NF

ISSUE #44:
TOKYO
TAKEOVER

NINTENDO TOKYO

POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD

LUIGI'S MANSION 3

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES: TOKYO 2020

TERRY BOGARD IN SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE

SUPER NINTENDO WORLD

RING FIT ADVENTURE

PERSONA 5 SCRAMBLE: THE PHANTOM STRIKERS

DORAEMON: STORY OF SEASONS

AI: THE SOMNIUM FILES

SNACK WORLD: THE DUNGEON CRAWL – GOLD

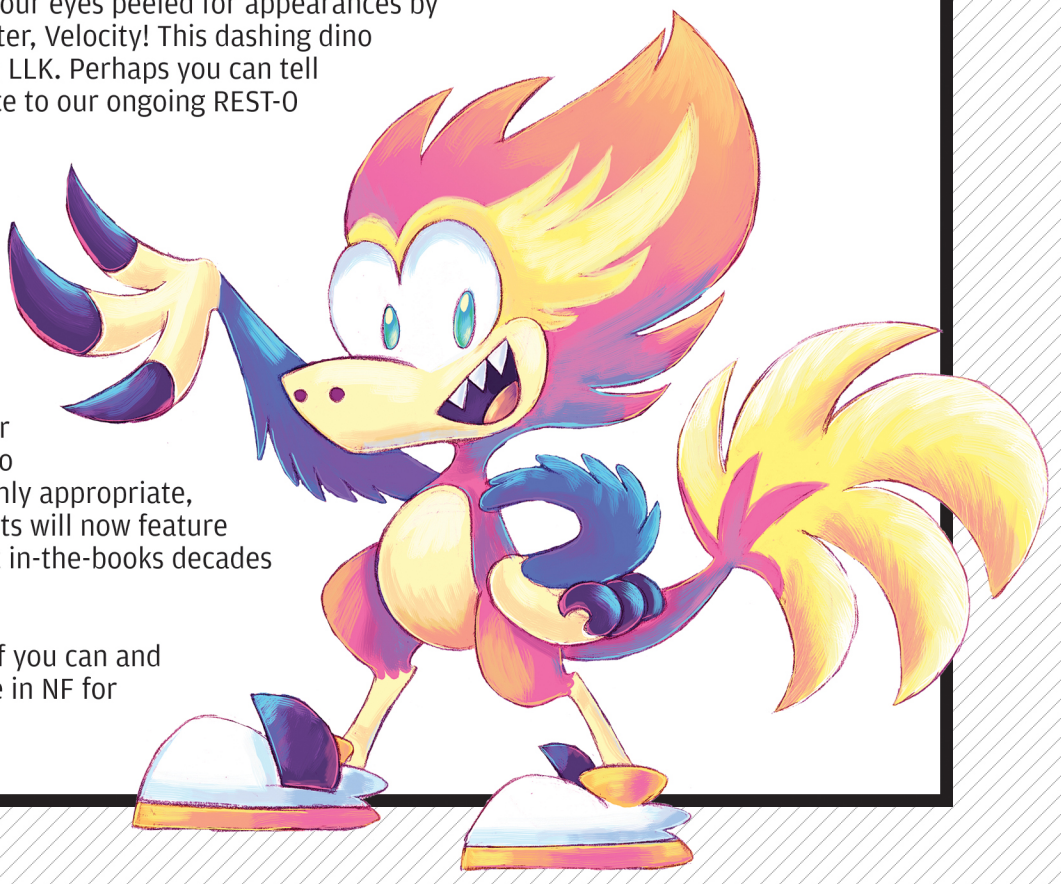
JANUARY/
FEBRUARY 2020

TUNE IN TO AGDQ!

PROGRAMMING NOTICE! Awesome Games Done Quick, the week-long livestreaming event that presents 24/7 speedruns of your favorite video games (and some truly awful ones for laughs) is coming back again beginning on January 5, 2020. And this AGDQ will mark the 10th anniversary of the Games Done Quick phenomenon!

Over the past decade, GDQ's events have raised money for charities like Doctor Without Borders and the Prevent Cancer Foundation. Millions upon millions of dollars have poured in, and I can't wait to see how well this latest week will do! Tune in live by visiting **GamesDoneQuick.com** – or, if you're reading this after the event has already ended, catch up with all the archived videos at **YouTube.com/GamesDoneQuick**.

While you watch, keep your eyes peeled for appearances by GDQ's new mascot character, Velocity! This dashing dino was designed by NF's own LLK. Perhaps you can tell by the artistic resemblance to our ongoing REST-0 comic strips? Velocity is a velociraptor, which is a perfect match for a speedrunning mascot. And for extra scientific accuracy, Velocity has feathers. (Get out of here with your old non-feathered dinosaurs, Jurassic Park!) And just for extra fun, Velocity can also travel through time! It's only appropriate, really, since the GDQ events will now feature games from four different in-the-books decades of history!



Enjoy the runs, donate if you can and check back next time here in NF for the full report! **– LUCAS**

ISSUE #44: TOKYO TAKEOVER

CONTENTS

INBOX 4

NEWS 8

DOWNLOAD 15

COMICS 7, 14, 54, 58, 80, 81

PREVIEWS 22

FEATURES 34

RETRO 47

INTERVIEW 55

REVIEWS 59

COMMUNITY 76

NEXT ISSUE 82

29

32

22

21

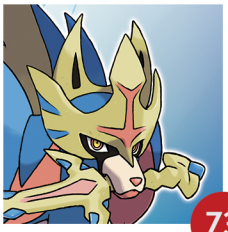
34

30

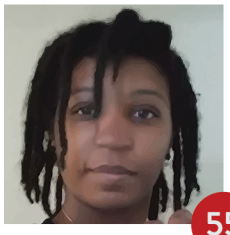
16

52

60


73

72


55

79

42

48

ON THE COVER

Fire Emblem returns to the cover of NF to serve as a parallel to our debut issue, exactly seven years ago! . . . Well, sort of. Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE started out as a Fire Emblem and Shin Megami Tensei crossover game, but it does so many new things that it hardly resembles either of its inspirations any more! You'll learn more in the pages ahead. Also, though Chrom isn't normally a part of the TMS#FE key art, we had to toss him in there at the bottom. More seven-year symmetry that way, you see!

17

INBOX

A TRIP TO TOKYO

All eyes are turning to Tokyo.

With 2019 giving way to 2020, it's time once again for international attention to be paid to that biggest spectacle of sports: the Olympic Games. And this time around, the Summer Olympics will be held in Tokyo, Japan — a city video game fans are already familiar with, since it also happens to serve as an international nexus of video game culture!

The connections have been directly made ever since the last Summer Games came to an end in 2016. As part of the closing ceremonies back then, Japan presented a "hype reel" of national pride to get people already looking four years ahead — and Mario was a major part of that! Japan has been preparing for the influx of attention and tourism ever since.

. . . And part of that preparation has been the construction of Nintendo's first-ever theme park, Super Nintendo World! For decades, Nintendo fans have longed for a physical location on the level of Disneyland to visit and celebrate their love of Mario, Zelda and all the rest of the Big N's brands, and Tokyo being selected to host the 2020 Summer Olympics was finally the thing that pushed Nintendo's plans for such a park into high gear.

What's more, Nintendo's first release of 2020 is also focused on Tokyo! It's right there in the name of Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore, a game in which the city and its culture (particularly its people's love of pop idols, TV stars and all other kinds of performers) take center stage.

Combine with all of that the fact that our NF team just so happens to have a writer who lived in Japan for three years recently (the good Mr. Tony Ponce), and we just had to craft a Tokyo-focused NF edition for you all! In the pages ahead, you'll get an introduction to the city through the eyes (and camera lens) of Mr. Ponce, supporting Tokyo-related features in the Download, Retro and Community sections, a final preview of Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore to prepare you for its January 17 debut and our full review of Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020 leading off the Reviews section, just to bring everything full circle.

I hope you enjoy this first NF of 2020, and my apologies to your wallet if you feel forced to book a flight to Japan after you've finished reading!

Lucas M. Thomas

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #43: NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2019

2019 came to an end with a return to the world of Pokémon. Though fans' rage boiled hot in the months leading up to the launch of Sword & Shield and we covered that controversy last time, the sales data is in and the games have sold phenomenally well — blowing past records set by prior titles in the series. (So it seems anyone who was angry enough to boycott their release didn't do too much damage to Game Freak's bottom line.) With that issue behind us, we now turn our attention to 2020 and its first big first-party release, Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore. We asked in the Poll if you'd played the Wii U version. We also asked if you've ever considered taking a trip to Japan. And thirdly we wanted to hear about your most wanted dream games that you'd like to see announced in 2020. As always, here's what you had to say:

LETTERS

Have I considered visiting Japan? I actually spent the summer there in 2009 working at a summer camp at the Tokyo American Embassy! I have always wanted to go back, and my family will be making the trip in 2026 when by daughter is 10 years old. We will of course visit Super Nintendo World and the Pokémon Center store (which I visited 10 years ago), and will get to see Tokyo Disneyland as well. I can't wait to share with my family why I fell in love with Tokyo and Japan all those years ago! **— JEFFREY WALKER**

I skipped Tokyo Mirage Sessions on the Wii U for a rather stupid reason: I don't fully know why, but I can't stand Japanese voiceovers. Made-up languages from games like Splatoon, Klonoa or even the squeaking in Golden Sun don't bother me. But for games like Persona or Muramasa, I have to turn off the Japanese V.O.s, and that sadly takes away from the game. My Spanish teacher taught us that the brain actually fights off learning a second language like a virus — but once you learn one you can learn others faster! He also said that music and movies are great mediums for learning new languages, so maybe video games are too? I never was fluent in Spanish, but I want to give TMS#FE its due — and it just might inspire me to learn Japanese so I can play it in all its glory!

I've never visited another country and have thought a lot about what Japan would be like. I see so much of their culture from video games, manga and anime, and it'd be amazing to see it firsthand. I'm not a fan of crowds or places where I could easily make a faux pas, but I'd be willing to brave it to see Japan's architecture and try the food. I'm ecstatic for the Olympics, and they'd never get me to leave Super Nintendo World. But if I could only do one thing, I'd want to meet all of the creators of all the Nintendo games I love, so I could personally thank them for how much their work has meant to me! **— BEN W.**

I've never heard of the brain fighting against learning a second language like it's a virus before — does that means a doctor's note could excuse a bad grade on a French test?

No, I did not play Tokyo Mirage Sessions on Wii U, so I'm looking forward to trying it on the Switch. And going to Japan is totally on my bucket list — I'd love to visit where Nintendo started and go to the gaming district. It would be the trip of a lifetime! **— MARTIN SCHMITZ**

We are WAY overdue for a new Mario Baseball or Strikers title. Those are my favorites of the Mario Sports games to play. There's plenty of potential for characters that haven't competed in those games yet, such as Pauline, Rosalina, the Koopalings and many more. Plus, with the Switch's focus on local multiplayer with the splitting of the Joy-Cons and the online multiplayer possibilities, they would easily become some of my most played games in the Switch's entire library. **— XAVIER GAVIN**

I'm gonna agree with you completely!

ROAD TRIP READY

Hello again Nintendo Force staff,

We can't thank you enough for your continued publication excellence. Our family can't get enough. We own every issue. When we travel, your issues go with us. Every two months, one, two and sometimes three of us compulsively check our mailbox for the latest issue. In a world of "instant digital gratification," this father is grateful for a magazine that draws my children's interest. Keep up the great work!

Standing by the mailbox,
– THE MILLER FAMILY

Thanks for the kind words! Contributing to the video game education of young Nintendo fans (and helping keep the peace on long car rides) is an honor for us!

DON'T ANGER THE OX

Hey Ox,

What's your top choice for a Switch port of a third-party GameCube game and why is it Hello Kitty: Roller Rescue? **– TREVO**
Because it's Sanrio, and hopefully that opens the door to Aggretsuko content.

Do you think that Funky Kong will be in Smash Ultimate? **– RICH**
Only if Nintendo doesn't want to be sued for false advertising in the name.

Would you have liked to see a Virtual Boy collection on the 3DS? **– TWO BUTTON CREW**
It's the biggest missed opportunity of our day.

A bit of an oldie, but do you know about the iQue Player, and if you do, what do you think of it?
– RAY KURTZ
1) Yes. 2) It exists.

Didn't play TMS#FE. I just don't think it was for me.

I would love to visit Japan one day. Primarily for Super Nintendo World, but there are other great locations I'd like to see as well.

And assuming games that have already been announced don't count, I'd love to see a sequel to Super Mario Odyssey in 2020! **– JULIO CABRERA**

The new game I want to see is The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening 2. You would play as Zelda trying to find Link after he disappeared in the storm. Zelda would retrace his path, but with more puzzles and more weapons and more bosses.

Um, Tokyo Marriage Sessions? I don't have a Wii U and why do people need marriage sessions? That's weird. Plus I don't think I understand how hard it is to get married because I'm ten and a half, but people play what they play and that's fine.

I would love love love to go to Super Nintendo World, but we don't have the money for all that gas and parking and all that. But maybe someday I will get to go.

Now I got to do my school work.
– YOUR 10-AND-A-HALF-YEAR-OLD FAN, BEN

My dream for 2020 would be Pikmin 4.

I didn't get a chance to play Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE.

I have considered visiting Japan. My wife's cousin settled down in Tokyo and has three children. I would love to visit someday, but with four kids of my own, it unfortunately won't be in time for the 2020 Olympics. We will visit Super Nintendo World though. **– DAVID STOREY**
Shout-out to a fellow father of four!

Every now and again – since 1990 – I go back to StarTropics; it's just a great game and I had voted for Mike to be added to Smash Bros. because he has an interesting arsenal.

Zoda's Revenge didn't really capture the magic for me like the original did, so I would like to see a StarTropics III; I think the series is way overdue and has tons of potential!

As far as Tokyo Mirage Sessions goes, I have the LE version on the Wii U, but haven't gotten around to it yet. I love Persona/SMT and am a major Fire Emblem fan, so I imagine I'll pick up the Switch port in order to support what is, I'm sure, considered a niche title with only a mild sales expectation . . . now just to carve out some time to dive in!

I would like to go to Japan, and it's really just a matter of time before my wife and I go. I would love to visit Super Nintendo World and hit all of the video game spots that people talk about, but what I'm most excited to do is spend time in the countryside – I'll bet I'm not the only one who would just love to jump into a Studio Ghibli setpiece if they could; there's a real sense of wonder and beauty in films like My Neighbor Totoro and When Marnie Was There. **– SHAYNE WARDEN**
If you wait a few more years, there's supposedly a Studio Ghibli theme park in the works as well! You could visit both it and Super Nintendo World in the same trip!

There are tons of games on my list that I would like to be confirmed for the Switch. Even though most of those games are or will be on other systems, the games I would like to see confirmed are: Persona 5 Royal, Trails of Cold Steel I, II and IV (with III already confirmed to release in the US in 2020), Tales of Arise, Fairy Tail, Final Fantasy VII Remake, Batman: The Enemy Within and more. To me the only game that will likely be confirmed would be a Switch port of Xenoblade Chronicles X – which would be great, because I missed out on it when it came out for the Wii U.

I also missed out on Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE on Wii U. Thankfully, I will get a second chance when it comes out on Switch, as it will be a Day 1 purchase for me! **– GEORGE LEE**

LETTERS, CONTINUED!

Going beyond the obvious picks for what games I want in 2020, like Odyssey 2, I would really love to see a sequel to Nintendo Land. I spent more time playing it than I would like to admit, but it could really benefit from a good sequel. Nintendo Land – essentially being a collection of minigames based on Nintendo's various IPs – has an infinite amount of possibilities and could be expanded to be something more. In the original game, as you played minigames, you collected coins. These coins were used to play, well, a minigame. This minigame allowed you to unlock various objects to add to your little amusement park, like the Master Sword or a Mario flagpole. Each item was interactable and had a little history blurb. They could take that to the next step and essentially make it a mini Nintendo Theme Park Tycoon and could tie it in with Super Nintendo World, which is conveniently also coming in 2020! And the best part is, Nintendo's new IP like ARMS and Splatoon can join the fun. Would be a fun way to have both a party game and to show Nintendo's history in one game! **– LIAM WOOD**

My dream game would be a remake of all three Dragon Quest: Rocket Slime games for the DS. I absolutely loved the first game (my sons and I have played through it multiple times) but the other two games in the series never made it to North America. Having them all in one package would be amazing – not only to revisit the first game, but to get a chance to actually play the sequels!

I borrowed Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE from my local library after it came out, played it for about an hour and decided that it just wasn't for me. I might try it again for the Switch but I really doubt my feelings about it would change that much.

I would really enjoy visiting Tokyo, but man, that long flight would be a bit too much for me. As a father of two small boys I doubt they would be able to handle that kind of travel now, and I doubt I'd be able to handle that kind of travel with them myself. **– PATRICK GADROW**

With the Joy-Cons including Wiimote functionality, my dream games for 2020 and beyond are HD remasters for every brilliant-yet-tragically-underrated Wii game that was released (and there are many): games like Little King's Story, Zack & Wiki, The Last Story, Pandora's Tower, Sin & Punishment, MadWorld and what might be the most misunderstood Wii game, Fragile Dreams. All of them deserve not just modern production values, but a second chance at an audience. **– JEREMY STRZYNSKI**

My dream announcement would be a new Pilotwings or a new Wave Race. It's been too long and both series give me the simple, pure joy of play.

I did play Mirage Sessions back in the day. The Wii U led an unfortunate life, but I loved it and I loved Mirage Sessions. I'm glad many Wii U games are getting a second lease on life, Mirage Sessions perhaps most of all.

I've wanted to visit Japan my whole life, but unfortunately disability and lack of funds has gotten in the way. Maybe someday though! I'd love to visit Super Nintendo World. **– PHOENIX MARINO-RAMER**

My dream game for 2020? Star Fox: Grand Prix! Duh!! If the "leaked" info on such a game is accurate, it would be tons of fun piloting an Arwing through a race course! Of course, there would have to be power-up items, like the smart bomb. A new main series Star Fox game would also be great, especially if it included Miyu Lynx, Fay Spaniel and Krystal! **– RAYMOND HINSHAW**

Star Fox: Grand Prix remains a question mark heading into 2020. Was it ever really real? I don't know!

If I had one dream game for Nintendo to at least announce next year, it would be a sequel to Kid Icarus: Uprising. Sure I'd settle for an HD remake, but Sakurai gave us such a beautiful world filled with wonderful characters for a journey that was both hilarious and heartfelt. We need more!

And I've actually been to Japan! Read Nintendo Force on the plane, bought Nintendo merchandise in all different shops in Kyoto and Akihabara, and even saw the Mario Kart racers before Nintendo shut them down. Definitely going to go back again, especially for Super Nintendo World! **– JOHN KNUDSEN**

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **David Storey**, the winner of last issue's Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to some Animal Crossing-related queries!

QUESTION #1

Let's hear your Animal Crossing story! When did you first experience the series? What was something funny that happened to you in-game?

QUESTION #2

There are lots of species of animals in the AC games – but if you could add a new one, what animal would you pick?

QUESTION #3

Hype check! Are you excited about Animal Crossing: New Horizons? Why or why not? Will you buy it on Day 1, wait a little later or skip it altogether?

Email your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #45" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win a brand-new copy of Animal Crossing: New Horizons!

NINTENDO FORCE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Lucas M. Thomas
@NintendoForce

STAFF WRITERS
Arlo
@ArloStuff
Evan Campbell
@evancampbell
Chris Carter
@DtoidChris
Kevin Cassidy
@GoNintendoTweet
Jonathan Holmes
@NonTrotski
Kevin Knezevic
@kevknez
Brett Martin
@NightramVGMM
David Oxford
@LBD_Nytetrayn
Nadia Oxford
@nadiaoxford
Tony Ponce
@megaStryke
Rebecca Rudranath
@strawbecky_81

STAFF ARTISTS
Mark Kelly
@Fryguy64
Lindsey Layne King
@Jazaaboo
Matthew Loffhagen
@kotorcomics
Matthew Taranto
@MatthewPTaranto
Thor Thorvaldson
@thormeister1971

CONTRIBUTORS
Josh Broadwell
@FionnTheBrave

BY JONATHAN HOLMES

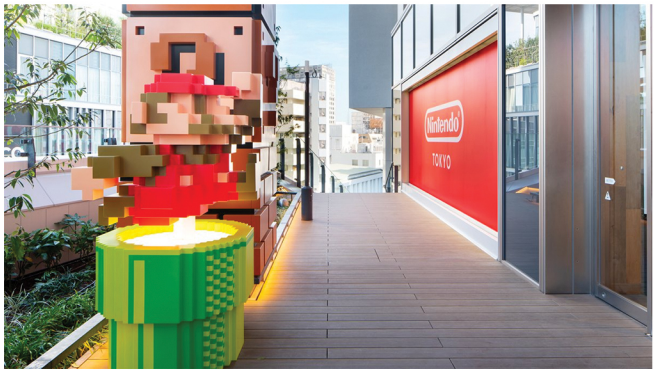
NINTENDO TOKYO!

An all-new nexus of Nintendo merchandise has opened its doors.

EVER SINCE THE Nintendo World Store changed its name to Nintendo New York, fans of Nintendo have been waiting patiently for an announcement of where a possible new location would spring up. Most folks assumed a location would end up in Japan at some point. It seemed odd not to have that be the first location!

On November 22, Tokyo finally got a taste of Nintendo store magic. The Nintendo Tokyo store is located in the Shibuya Parco shopping center on the sixth floor, and on its first days the wait to enter peaked at around six hours to get in with a ticket, with an average of three hours. Statues of Mario, Link, Inkling Girl, Isabelle, Timmy and Tommy stood atop kiosks featuring goods from their respective series. (For a taste of the exclusive merchandise available there during launch — and there's a ton of it — flip over to the Collector's Corner!) There are over a thousand unique items to browse through, and that includes the latest games. In fact, several demo stations allowed visitors to play around with the latest Switch titles before purchasing.

Many characters march along the windows outside and inside the shop, directing shoppers to apparel, home goods, plushes and many more unique items. With two of these official shops in the world, now we have to wonder how each new major game launch will go, and what exclusive merchandise for each will potentially exist. This launch also begs the question of just how many locations of the Nintendo store the company plans to open, and are they taking suggestions? **— BRETT**



. . . Plus Pokémon . . .

In the new Pokémon Center Shibuya store!

POKÉMON CENTERS ARE no stranger to Tokyo, as several exist there already. One even has a café attached to it! However, a new location opened in the Tokyo Shibuya Parco shopping center — right across from the Nintendo Tokyo store! They both opened the same day, so you can imagine the commotion on the sixth floor (and the wait lines stretched for blocks). A life-size Mewtwo in an incubation tank greeted shoppers in an eerie way, but soon they were seeing the exclusive "Graffiti Pikachu" life-size plush that stood guarding numerous plushes and merchandise exclusive to the store's grand opening.

The opening also had a collaboration with Swarovski which featured several phone cases, keychains, a card deck and even a large Pikachu adorned with Swarovski crystals. Tons of merchandise lines the walls, including exclusive apparel and accessories, bags, totes, pouches, smartphone cases, plushes, kitchenware and, naturally, Pokémon cards. On hand for the opening were plenty of plush Sobbles, Grookeys and Scorbunnies, as well as Pokémon Sword & Shield's legendary Pokémon Zamazenta and Zacian. Don't miss the giant Mew on display either, as he's hanging from the ceiling! If you visited during the opening period, a special Pikachu Shibuya Pokémon card was added to your bag at checkout, and for spending enough you could get exclusive bags or even a Graffiti Mew wall sticker. **— BRETT**

. . . and Capcom Too!

Capcom Store Tokyo is also open now.

JAPAN GETS ALL the best stuff — as far as gaming is concerned, anyway!

Nestled right near the newest Pokémon Center and Nintendo Tokyo, there's also a brand-new Capcom Store in the Shibuya Parco shopping center. As usual, exclusive products abound, as well as merchandise from series such as Resident Evil, Monster Hunter, Mega Man, Devil May Cry and Phoenix Wright. While there's no shortage of Mega Man merch . . . well . . . anywhere, I'm sure a lot of folks would scramble for an elusive set of Phoenix Wright and Apollo Justice perfume. If that's a little too out there, you can find plenty of toys, models, T-shirts and trinkets. Out of everything in stock, the Umbrella Corporation (Resident Evil) candy is probably my favorite concept.

Other highlights include a giant Ryu statue and an official Capcom mural designed by famed artist Toshiaki "Shinkiro" Mori, which includes homages to all of the aforementioned franchises, as well as Dead Rising, Okami and Ghosts 'n Goblins. That same mural is emblazoned on multiple products and has become the signature mark of this official Tokyo location.

But Capcom has always had a large presence in Tokyo, whether it's by way of myriad arcade machines dotting the landscape, or the lovely "Capcom Cafés" that are located across the region! **— CHRIS**

On Sale at Nintendo Tokyo

Just a few of the items you'll find in the brand-new store!

SO MANY ITEMS are exclusive to the Nintendo Tokyo store! There's a whole set of grand opening items that includes pins, tape, straps, notebooks, water bottles, stickers, pouches, cushions, mugs, pens, cookies and shirts. These were adorned with Zelda, Mario, Splatoon or Animal Crossing heroes. Three of these series also saw sets of exclusive goods available at the store. Animal Crossing got a set of ceramic kitchenware, as well as oven mitts. Splatoon got apparel, badges and even a skateboard deck. Mario got a "Super Mario Family Life" set of mostly melamine goods that had place settings consisting of mats, mugs, plates, bowls and chopsticks, but also had a Mario cushion for good measure. Another set of more traditional merchandise called the "Power-up" line added more bags, pouches, pens, cases and notebooks, but they all featured some of Mario's best power-ups. The highlights of this line are the five plushes: Tanooki Mario, Propeller Mario, Cat Mario, Penguin Mario and the all-new Kuribo's Shoe Mario!

Aside from the grand opening goods, it's not known whether all of this merchandise is exclusive to the store, but it's certainly the only place to get it all right now. Good luck importing!

Collector's Corner is compiled by Brett Martin, the world record holder for the largest collection of video game memorabilia on Earth. For more cool collectibles and information on how to order from import shops, visit his site, The Video Game Memorabilia Museum, at videogamemm.com.

8-Bit Mix-Up

A Mario & Pokémon partnership.

IT'S NOT THE first collaboration between Pokémon and Nintendo properties, but it may be the largest and most interesting so far! With Pokémon Center Shibuya and the Nintendo Tokyo store opening across from each other, it was obvious that there should be some way to commemorate that fact, and commemorate they did!

The goods themselves take sprites from each other's games to build larger sprites. For example, if you look at the goods from afar, it appears that it's just a Pikachu or Mario sprite on a brightly colored shirt. Upon closer inspection, you can see that Pikachu is actually comprised of several different Mario sprites, like used blocks, enemies, coins and even Mario himself. Conversely, Mario is built using colorized assets from the Game Boy Pokémon games. It's not just the main mascots either, as Bowser, Goomba, Squirtle, Charmander, Bulbasaur, Mewtwo and more are also featured. Shirts, hoodies, cushions, mugs, towels and puzzles all have the characters printed on them. The Mario items are on sale in the Pokémon Center, while the Pokémon goods are in the Nintendo Tokyo store. What a brilliant and playful idea!

Season's Greetings

Tokyo's holiday season shoppers score a festive bonus.

APPARENTLY THE FLOOD of merchandise covered in the other segments of Collector's Corner just wasn't enough for the Nintendo Tokyo store! As a largely unnecessary incentive to spend money at the store, every 5000 yen spent was met with a little randomly packaged bonus. Each blind bag revealed one of five chosen ornaments. All had Christmas-themed characters printed on them. Santa Mario rides Rudolph Yoshi, while Luigi, Peach and Toad all wear Santa hats. A fifth ornament has the Nintendo Tokyo logo and presents, and this one appeared far less than the others. It's sure to be a rare, sought-after treasure!

Season's, Uh, Eatings?

Leaving these cookies for Santa will get you on the nice list for sure.

WHILE THE NEW Capcom Store Tokyo largely has goods that have been available previously, they're now all in one convenient spot. There were, of course, exclusive goods available at the store launch, like some perfumes, chocolates and other oddities. One exclusive oddity in particular was turning heads, and that was the printed cookies the store was offering. A whole section of wall in the store was dedicated to the rows of character confections. With 14 total characters adorning cookies, there were a surprising amount to choose from. Mega Man, Ryu, Arthur and others enticed potential customers, but I doubt these "collectibles" would stand the test of time. (That, or Mega Man might look like Leaf Shield Mega Man in about five years!) Each cookie is around 500 yen, which is a little under $5, so you'd need around $70 to eat 'em all. Urp.

Theme Park Progress

Super Nintendo World is coming together!

IT'S BEEN A long wait, but we're finally nearing the finish line. (The first finish line, at least!) Super Nintendo World, the Nintendo-themed theme park first announced nearly five years ago, is in its final phase of construction.

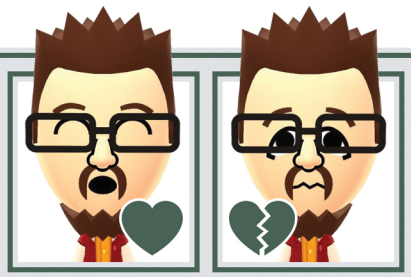
In Japan, that is! We'll have to wait a little longer for the Hollywood and Florida versions, but Universal Studios Japan is almost ready to open the World's gates to the world. It's planned to be open in time for the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, and the start date for that event is July 24, so sometime before then!

A new promotional image released by Universal Studios in November (seen above) showcases a few final revisions compared to older concept art — new lampposts pepper the landscape, and you can see the Yoshi carts guests will get to ride in for the Yoshi's Adventure attraction! Meanwhile, a construction site photo snapped by Twitter user @LCASTUDIOS_USJ, seen to the right, proves actual progress is indeed being made. Mario's mountain is already done!

Just don't book a flight to Tokyo to visit this park. It's located in Osaka!

— LUCAS

Great!
The Nintendo theme park is nearly ready!



Oh.
The wait continues for both American locations.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

KICKING OFF NOT only a new year but also a new decade, Nintendo's first first-party release of 2020 is Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore, dropping onto store shelves on January 17 and also serving as our cover game for this NF issue! Jonathan has penned a beefy preview complete with playable character introductions to get you all up to speed and get your hype in gear, and you'll find that beginning on Page 22.

NEXT UP IS most likely a game that won't actually follow Tokyo Mirage Sessions in January, but we want to go ahead and get your hype started for it as well! Eastward is currently penciled in for an "Early 2020" debut in the Switch eShop, and you can read more about why you should consider adding it to your wishlist by flipping to Page 16.

WE DO HAVE a couple more actually defined release dates, thankfully, and Nintendo's plan for February seems to center around this long-awaited localization of a Level-5 RPG: Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl - Gold! It will officially go on sale at retail locations and in the Switch eShop on Valentine's Day, February 14. Perhaps your significant other would want to skip dinner out on the town and stay inside for Snacks instead?

AS WINTER GIVES way to spring, all Nintendo fans' thoughts will already be turning to summer thanks to the tropical island setting of Animal Crossing: New Horizons! It's carrying on the series tradition of letting you live and work alongside animal neighbors beginning on March 20. Get ready for a big AC blowout in the next NF issue!

AS THIS ISSUE wraps in mid-December 2019 and is sent out the door to be printed, packaged and shipped out to all of you around the world, Nintendo's only got four official entries on their press site's list of upcoming releases — and Xenoblade is the last of them! (BOTW2 isn't even there yet.) I don't expect this game will appear too early in the year, but I'd be thrilled to be wrong about that. See Page 26 for another look!

FINALLY, NINTENDO IS showing a little more love to fans in Japan and Europe, since they're getting a new Switch entry in the "Brain Age" series on December 27 and January 3, respectively. While we await word on whether or not American brains will get to also be trained again soon, we've got a quick look at the new sequel on Page 32.

Dr Kawashima's BRAIN TRAINING for Nintendo Switch

"Once again we find ourselves heading into a new year with only a handful of confirmed games on the horizon from the Big N. But then Nintendo regularly presents a Direct video early in each year to fill in the gaps with lots of fresh game announcements, so I'd expect we're due for that! — LUCAS

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 3 THE BLACK ORDER Expansion Pass

HOORAY! I GOT the character I wanted! I'm going to have to actually dive into Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3 myself now that the second DLC expansion pack, Rise of the Phoenix, has confirmed the addition of my favorite X-Man as a playable character: Gambit! (All you old fans of the '90s X-Men cartoon know Remy was the best.) He'll be joined by Cable, Iceman and Jean Grey in her Phoenix persona as the four new heroes when the DLC goes live on December 23. Though Jean will also pull double duty as she becomes the villainous Dark Phoenix as well!

Only one more DLC pack remains after that: the Fantastic Four-themed "Shadow of Doom" set for Spring 2020. Surely Reed, Sue, Johnny and Ben are getting ready for clobberin' time!

BY MARK KELLY

MARIO IN TOKYO!

Speeding into the real world at long last.

WHILE OUR REVIEW of the new mobile game Mario Kart Tour should have sufficiently warned you about the game's shortcomings (a 3.0 review rating should get anyone's undivided attention), one positive I want to add to last issue's evaluation is that the game is finally blazing a trail I'd personally hoped Nintendo would explore for years: venturing into our world!

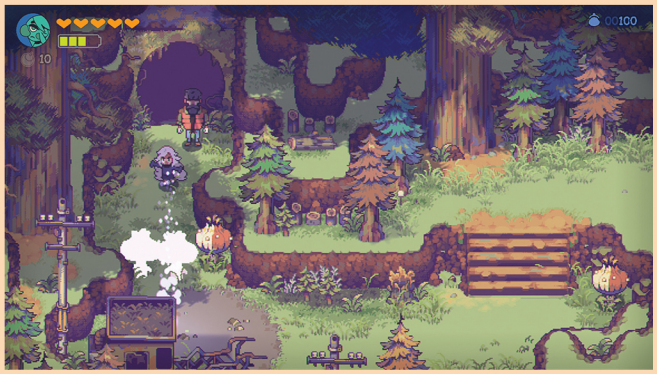
The real world. Planet Earth. For as long as Nintendo has been producing video game entertainment for the population of this globe, you'd think there would be more instances of the actual world around us being directly adapted into playable in-game environments.

I got excited when Super Mario Odyssey was first revealed, because it looked at first like Nintendo was going to send Mario globetrotting around the real world! But, well, that line of thinking must have fizzled out just partway through development. We ended up with New Donk City instead – inspired heavily by New York City, of course, but not meant to directly be a representation of actual NYC. Then Bowser's Kingdom had a lot of influences from Japanese history in its architecture and theming, but it was not meant to really be a slice of actual Japan being lorded over by King Koopa.

But Mario Kart Tour has picked up the ball that Odyssey dropped! This painfully monetized mobile spin-off of the famous Kart series has already sent racers speeding through honest-to-goodness representations of real-world cities like New York City, Paris, London and, yes, Tokyo!

The Tokyo Blur racetrack weaves its way through a stylized cartoon take on Japan's capital, swerving players past such notable landmarks as the Tokyo Tower, the National Diet Building and the Miraikan. Peach and Mario can even dress for the occasion, donning a kimono and hakama, respectively!

It's only a few big cities so far, and each one's track is only available for a limited time, but I'm still thankful to the otherwise miserable Mario Kart Tour for getting Nintendo's attention back on real-world locations. Now where's my fresh Pilotwings sequel that lets me fly all the way across America again, Big N? **– LUCAS**



A Miner & A Minor

An unlikely pair of traveling companions are heading Eastward.

EVERY ERA OF games has its archetypes. The '80s were packed with cartoon mascots, while the '90s saw an influx of Hollywood-style action heroes. The '00s were dominated by badboy anti-heroes, and the '10s were mad about Dads. Games have grown up a lot in the past 40 years, which is maybe why some of their protagonists have grown with them, going on to head families of their own.

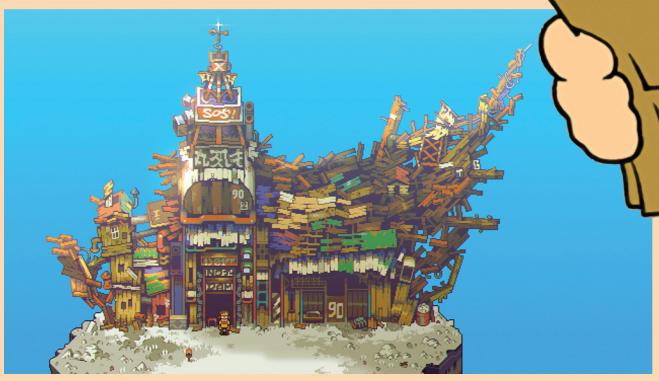
Always the youthful one, Nintendo has been a little less quick to adopt the trend of fatherly leads. God of War has Kratos, The Last of Us has Joel, Yakuza has Kizuma, Lisa had Brad Armstrong, Resident Evil has Barry Burton, Octodad has . . . Octodad, while Nintendo's only big-name Daddy is Bowser. That said, between Bowser Jr. and all seven Koopalings, he's certainly got his hands full.

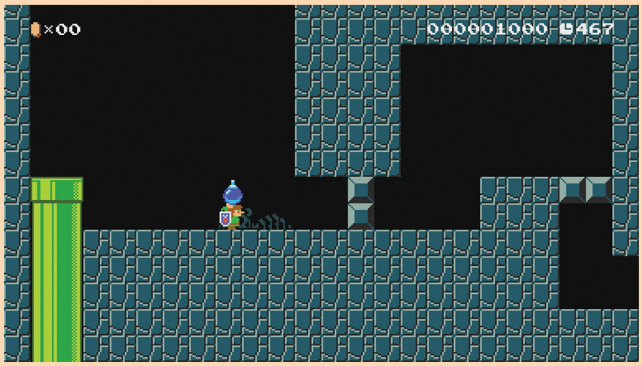
Upcoming indie action RPG Eastward will add at least one Dad to the Switch's growing catalog of paternal figures. In the near future, at a time when the human population is shrinking and monsters have begun to roam the Earth, a working man named John discovers a girl with otherworldly white hair in a shadowy underground facility. Her name is Sam, and he immediately takes on a parental role in her life. Together they must unravel the cause of the world's pending demise and do their best to stop it.

The player controls both characters as they care for each other and explore the increasingly abandoned buildings, train stations, speakeasies and storefronts in their quaint little town, while occasionally fending off attacks on their lives from a bizarre menagerie of beasts. Aesthetically, the game feels a lot like Mother 3, but with even more detailed characters and environments. There's an air of sweet sadness to the people here. With society breaking down, they are more free to be themselves than ever before, while at the same time feeling trapped by the apocalypse that seems to be right around the corner.

Controlling John and Sam is a much more hopeful experience, as their teamwork empowers them in ways that neither ever imagined were possible.

Development on Eastward started in 2015 with a team of just three people, so this one has been a long time coming. Even now, the game's Twitter feed is filled with updates on how the dynamic lighting system, combat mechanics and story are continuing to evolve, so it seems to still be in the thick of development. Publisher Chucklefish, best known for bringing Stardew Valley and Wargroove to the Switch eShop, has been helping move Eastward toward a 2020 release date though. With their powers combined, Switch owners should be headed East soon enough! **– JONATHAN**





SUPER LINK MAKER?!

A new Super Mario Maker 2 update has added the Hero of Hyrule!

OK, SO AT this point I have to believe that Nintendo is trolling us.

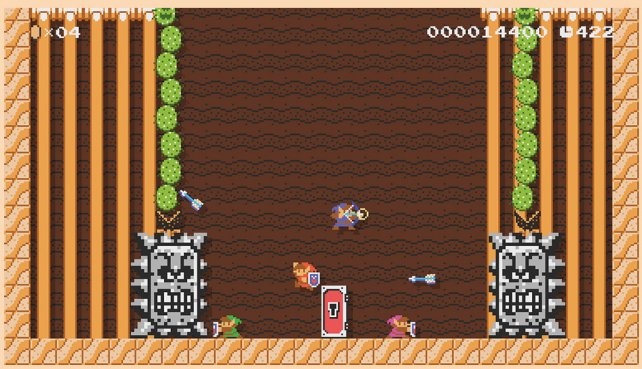
First, we had the reveal of the Link's Awakening remake. Its strict adherence to the original block-by-block Game Boy grid system of rendering the island of Koholint made me begin to think that a Zelda Maker game might be in the works behind the scenes at Nintendo, and I said as much a few issues ago.

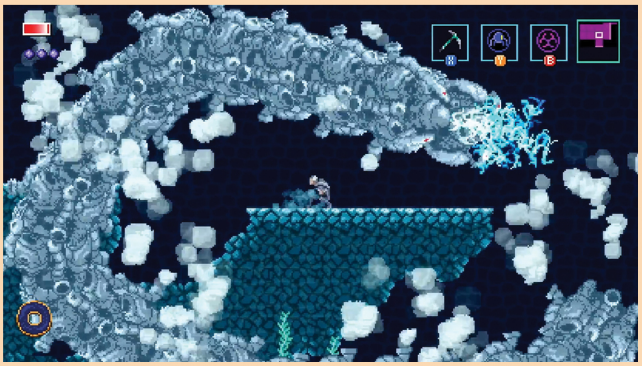
Second, when E3 came around last June, the company straight-up confirmed that Zelda Making was on their mind with the reveal of the labyrinth-building Chamber Dungeon mode included as an extra in that same Link's Awakening remake. I began to scratch my head all the more vigorously, while also popping one eyebrow toward the sky.

And now, on this past December 5, the next piece of the puzzle fell into place: Nintendo debuted a massive new Version 2.0 update for Super Mario Maker 2, and the centerpiece of the free DLC package is a new Master Sword power-up. When Mario grabs it, he transforms into Link! You then get to play through Mushroom Kingdom worlds as the Hero of Hyrule, wielding tons of his signature tools and skills.

Again, at this point, Nintendo is either truly working on a real Zelda Maker game that they plan to unveil in the near future . . . or else they're dancing all the way around that idea and laughing at the hopeful fools like yours truly who are reading more into the "clues" than we should.

Whether or not Zelda Maker ever materializes as its own product, though, the addition of Link in Super Mario Maker 2 is outstanding. Mario could previously take on Link's look via the Mystery Mushroom in the first Super Mario Maker — but that was entirely cosmetic. Here, the transformation is legitimate, as this Link can now slash with the Master Sword, deflect projectiles with his shield, perform a down thrust to stab through whole lines of enemies beneath him, toss bombs to break through block barriers, dash with the power of the Pegasus Boots and even fire arrows with his bow that can both damage foes and collect items hovering at a distance. What's more, the music and sound effects of good old Zelda 1 come along for the ride! It's an incredible addition, and it's already prompted an all-new wave of creative courses from the SMM2 community's best Makers! **— LUCAS**





ONE-MAN SHOW, PART 2

Tom Happ makes it happen again in Axiom Verge 2.

21 ISSUES AGO, in NF #23 covering September/October 2016, we had the honor of featuring Tom Happ and Dan Adelman in the Interview section. Tom was the one-man workhorse who'd created the brilliant Axiom Verge, an indie smash that had debuted on PlayStation 4 in 2015 and had just been ported to the Wii U as that NF issue was wrapping up. Dan was the ex-Nintendo eShop guru who'd gone independent and was helping Tom to jump through all the hoops of the video game publishing process.

Deep into that interview, Tom made brief mention that he was already working on his next game. It was in the context of discussing his son's severe health issues — the driving force behind his game creation ever since he was born. He said, "I have to keep working on the next game, not just because that's what I want to do, but because I have to think about how I can provide for him through my lifetime and after."

Well, as it turns out, that "next game" was none other than Axiom Verge 2. Tom had already been secretly working on the sequel for the better part of a year at the time of that interview . . . and since that interview was so long ago now, Tom's now been hacking away at it for over four years!

He finally went public with an official announcement of the game's existence while introducing its debut trailer, placed in that most coveted "one more thing" spot at the tail end of Nintendo's most recent Indie World broadcast. The sequel is currently set to debut in Fall 2020, and once again Tom is tackling every aspect of it entirely on his own. He's done all the gameplay design. Laid out all the levels. Created every single piece of pixel art, one pixel at a time. Composed all the music! Done all the programming! Almost certainly brewed all of his own cups of coffee to keep himself awake while doing all that other work!

It's flabbergastingly amazing to me that any one person could have so much game design talent lying within one brain, but Tom Happ has it. I'd support this release for that reason alone — it's just going to be a wonderful bonus that the game itself will almost surely be incredible, since the first Axiom Verge was a masterpiece. But the real reason to support this sequel, above all? Continuing to help Tom care for his son, of course. I hope you'll buy a copy too! **— LUCAS**

7.0

Anime and Agriculture

DORAEMON: STORY OF SEASONS

THE FIRST OFFICIAL Switch entry in the Story of Seasons franchise is another collaboration with a beloved Japanese pop culture icon — this time, Doraemon, the robot cat from the future — in Doraemon: Story of Seasons. It's reminiscent of early Harvest Moon titles (such as Harvest Moon 64 and Harvest Moon: Back to Nature on the PlayStation) and tries to recreate their cozy atmosphere along with integrating a mystery that Doraemon, Noby and their friends must unravel in order to find their way home from Natura, nestled within the roots of the Elder Tree.

Everything that you've come to expect from a Story of Seasons game is here: You've got a plot of land to grow your crops, barns to raise livestock, places to fish and areas to explore and forage. The village has people to befriend (but no marriage — these are just kids, after all) and festivals to win.

It didn't feel like I was missing out on anything by not being aware of the Doraemon franchise; the game does a good job at setting up and portraying the characters right off the bat — Noby's a lazy elementary school kid, Sue's the sweet and demure love interest, Big G likes throwing his weight around and Sneech is the spoiled rich kid.

I wasn't bothered by the lack of an English dub, but one could have been included without detracting from the overall gameplay.

However, the localization could have used some more work: Saying "no" to someone asking about the status of a fetchquest will cancel the quest entirely, you receive some misleading directions during one quest's treasure hunt and a rolling pin is called a "cotton swab" (the terms are interchangeable in Japanese). Even Doraemon's favorite dorayaki are sometimes called by their localized name, yummy buns!

Another aspect that turned me off: the heavy dependence on mining. In other Story of Seasons games, tool upgrades are performed for a reasonable fee and a few pieces of material. But here, after you've done the first level upgrade (a reasonable 30 pieces of copper and stone) you'll need to gather all that *again* for each level after the first! It took me weeks in-game to mine enough copper, iron *and* silver to upgrade my pick to the 3rd level, and Noby doesn't start out with very much inventory space to begin with.

The visual and audio presentations are where Doraemon: Story of Seasons really shine. The graphics are presented as if they're painted on textured watercolor paper, and items you can interact with (like boulders, trees and animals) get highlighted in yellow when you approach. (I wish this extended to the shipping box; I've accidentally eaten a lot of good crops.) The music is beautiful, with lots of gentle melodies that remind me of Joe Hisaishi's compositions for Studio Ghibli films.

As much as I wanted to love Doraemon: Story of Seasons for its bright colors and wonderful music, it's bogged down by repetitiveness and poor pacing. However, it stands apart from other licensed games with all the care taken to integrate the Doraemon characters into an original story, without anything being shoehorned in awkwardly. If you like Doraemon, you'll probably like this tale, but as a Story of Seasons fan, I would rather not spend my farming life in Natura.

— REBECCA

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO DEVELOPERS: BROWNIES & MARVELOUS RATING: E

Tokyo Night Life in Your Living Room

KARAOKE JOYSOUND

GOING TO A Japanese-style karaoke parlor is an experience not to be missed, but if you're mourning the closure of your favorite haunt (R.I.P. DoReMi Karaoke in Allston, Massachusetts) or don't live anywhere near a Round 1, there's a way to bring that experience home on the Nintendo Switch. Karaoke Joysound is an app exclusive to the Japanese eShop that gives you access to over 140,000 songs — and not just in Japanese!

Aside from the obvious language barrier, the only other obstacle is payment. Karaoke Joysound is not dependent on a Switch Online membership, but you can only use Japanese eShop credit to purchase the song tickets. There are various plans available, from a three-hour mini concert to a 90-day unlimited pass. Once you have your payment in — and most importantly, if you have the original Switch with Dock — all you'll need is a USB microphone (a quick search on Amazon should present you with some affordable options) to get going.

There are a bunch of different options to perform to, like a "piano roll" to track your pitch (similar to the one used for vocals in Rock Band), or ambient effects like a concert hall or "live house" (a Japanese nightclub). There are also various video options: a visual equalizer, stock footage videos you'd typically see on Japanese karaoke machines, a "special video" option that features footage from various first-party Switch titles and, finally, the Mii Stage, where your Mii can dress in various costumes and sing and dance on various virtual concert stages. (My Mii performed "Santa Baby" by Madonna in a seasonally appropriate tropical paradise.)

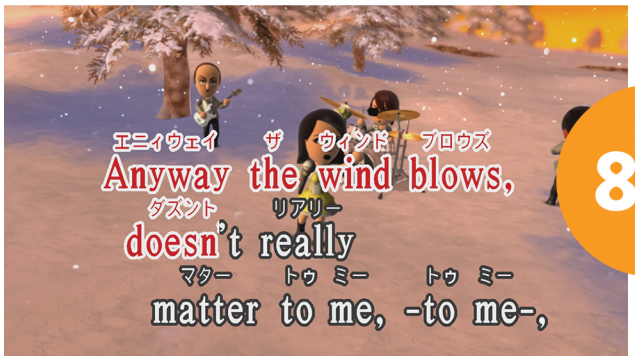
There are also two different grading systems you can enable to compare your performance against other users. Most — but not all — of the Japanese songs present the words in furigana by default, while the English lyrics can sometimes have a few mistakes.

Along with searching by title, artist or series, there's also a menu that lets you search by genre (songs in English, anime/game music, Disney, etc.). However, searching using a Joy-Con is a time-consuming process, as you'll need to input your query letter by letter (or kana by kana). Another option is KyokuNavi, a companion app that can be downloaded to an Android or iOS device. (I was able to find it on my U.S. iPhone by searching "JOYSOUND" in all caps in the App Store.) Pair it with your Switch by scanning the on-screen QR code, and you'll be able to not only search, but also set video options, queue songs and adjust the audio with it.

As for English songs, there's a wide variety, but a limited selection — many world famous artists (The Beatles, Queen, Elvis, etc.) have some good representation, while others are surprisingly absent (seriously, *one* Depeche Mode song?). Basically, if it's reached mainstream popularity, it *may* be on here — there's not much country music, for instance. However, if you're a fan of anime or game music, this is your element — Karaoke Joysound would be an excellent way to run a karaoke room at an anime convention.

Language and purchase barriers aside, if you love to sing and are willing to do the legwork on your part, you will love Karaoke Joysound. Grab your friends, grab some snacks and drinks, and let's get this party started! **— REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: XING
RATING: CERO A



8.0

In the West For the First Time
SEGA AGES: ICHIDANT-R

REMEMBER THE BONANZA BROS., Sega's pair of likeable thieves who look like they snuck out of a LEGO playset? They were even featured in Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing!

Well, whether you remember them or not, they were popular enough back in the '90s to warrant a spin-off trilogy of "puzzle and action" games, of which Ichidant-R was the second. No need to worry about keeping up with continuity here, though, as things are pretty straightforward: The backdrop is a theatre play in which a princess has been kidnapped by the Demon King, and it's up to our daring heroes to save the day by completing a number of minigames to thwart the knights guarding the way.

With this Sega Ages release, you've got your choice of two ways to play: the original arcade release or the Mega Drive home port. Despite the choice here, however, you might find yourself drawn more to one or the other — in all likelihood, the arcade release. While the Mega Drive version has Competitive and Free Modes that allow up to four players, it's also in Japanese, making some of the menus trickier to peruse without consulting a guide of some sort (or just trial and error).

Unlike the Mega Drive version, on the other hand, the arcade version did see an international release, so it can be played in English. And this may be the way you want to go, at least to start, as it features a Helper mode that increases the number of lives each player receives, while dialing back the number of tasks (minigames) required to finish the game.

That said, the game itself reminds me somewhat of Mario Party, but without the board; alternatively, it might also be compared to WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Microgame$, but a bit less "micro." Each stage features one of the Demon King's minions and a rotating selection of four minigames for you to stop the cursor on. Beat one, and another of the 20 total replaces it in the selection until the minion is defeated, and you progress to the next round.

The minigames themselves are fun more often than not, and feature everything from shooting down a UFO to stopping a car as close to the edge of a cliff as you can without going over, determining which coffin a vampire is in, switching tracks for a train to collect coins, mimicking shooting patterns and more.

There's a nice bit of variety here, though you're inevitably going to see the same games pop up several times before reaching the end. They do get a bit more challenging as you progress, and while your mileage here may vary, the game manages to end just before they really wear out their welcome.

Overall, I had a pretty fun time playing Ichidant-R — though it was admittedly all by myself. With that in mind, I don't think I'll feel an especially strong inclination to return to it very soon unless a second player joins in, as adding a bit more competition to the proceedings would do well to shake things up and make the experience feel fresh again. **— DAVID**

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPERS: SEGA & M2 RATING: E

The Sequel the States Never Saw
SEGA AGES: COLUMNS II

IN THE WAKE of Tetris' explosion in popularity, Sega famously struck back with Columns. Though a visually attractive alternative, the reception was divisive, to say the least — either it grabbed you, or it didn't.

For me, I've been trying to get into Columns for some time, but it's been a bit rough, as one could argue it's not as instantly intuitive as the Russian falling block puzzle game. In Columns, pieces consisting of three jewels fall from the ceiling, and it's up to you to rearrange them vertically and place them so that at least three gems of the same color match, then are subsequently eliminated.

Personally, I felt like the original ramped things up a bit too quickly, while Columns III forces you into a competitive mode (even in single-player) that only complicates things further if you're still a jewel-matching novice. Interestingly, this second game in the series was passed over for release in North America for decades until this Sega Ages version came along. More interestingly, I think this is my preferred installment of the three!

Make no mistake, though, this game still has some bite to it — even on Easy, as the speed seems to increase over time, rather than by level. I struggle to get past the second level, though that's still better than my performance in the other two games, even if a lot of my combos seem to come more by accident than design. Columns II: A Voyage Through Time was originally presented in an arcade coin-op cabinet, and its quarter-munching design seems apparent here.

Visually, the game makes a nice impression, with pieces that are colorful — yet not blindingly so — matched against backgrounds with a visual motif that gives the game its subtitle, featuring stone walls, artistic engravings and high-tech machinery. The soundtrack is pretty good, too, ranging from upbeat and energetic to slower and methodical to pulse-pounding and intense.

Other modes include Flash Columns, where your goal is to eliminate the flashing pieces, "Skull Smash," which removes flashing skulls and unlocks stage select, and VS mode, wherein you compete against another player (CPU or another human, online or off). Then there's the new Infinite Jewels mode, where you can play "virtually forever." I actually favor this mode, as I was able to reach Level 10 there.

In terms of other bonus features, the art for various classic Sega characters featured in the shared Sega Ages intro can be unlocked in the Jewel Case by clearing stages in the game's Flash Mode. You can initiate a VS option that rotates Player 2's half of the screen 180 degrees for face-to-face play, change jewel style, adjust difficulty and input precision and all the usual display and save options that come with these releases.

Oh, and as a bonus, the first Columns is included, too!

Sega Ages: Columns II offers the most enjoyment I've managed to get out of this series to date, and if anyone else is interested in giving the series another shot, this is probably the best place to do it. **— DAVID**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPERS: SEGA & M2 RATING: E

9.5

SNK Gets That Sakurai Love

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE: CHALLENGER PACK 4

SMASH CHARACTERS COULD be split into four categories: the ever-relevant icons (Mario, Ryu), the "I'm promoting my new game" wild cards (Corrin, Joker), the currently-between-jobs-but-still-adored fan favorites (Lucas, Banjo & Kazooie) and the "What are you doing here?!" ultra curveballs (R.O.B., Piranha Plant). Depending on whom you ask, Terry Bogard could fit in one or all of those categories. He's been a consistent face in the fighting game scene since the '90s, with his most recent starring role (albeit in the form of a beautiful young woman) being in the recently released SNK Heroines, though his heyday has arguably been over for years. None of his games have been big sellers for a while now, especially on Nintendo consoles. None of that seemed to matter to Masahiro Sakurai, the creator of Smash Bros. During his 45-minute Terry Direct, he gushed and gushed about the fighter's history, his meaning to the world of games and what makes playing him special. In fact, the King of Fighters series (Terry's biggest franchise) was part of what inspired Sakurai to develop Smash in the first place. While some Nintendo fans have never heard of him, it was clear that his invitation to Nintendo's most prestigious tournament was sent with love.

It's no surprise then that he is one Smash's most complex and potentially powerful combatants yet. You could say he's a cross between Little Mac and Ryu, but that's just scratching the surface. Other than his limited-range Power Wave projectile (which is also the move Kirby steals from Terry upon inhaling him), all of Terry's Specials have him rocketing across the screen in one way or another, usually with the option to cancel into another move midway through. He's a fast, high-risk, high-reward contender who can do big damage right out of the gate, but if you want to see everything he's got, it's going to take practice. Like Ryu, using "old-school" inputs for his Specials beefs up their power, and you can change their speed and strength based on how long you hold down the button.

For long-time Terry fans hoping to get something new out of their boy, he's the first Smash character to have two separate Side Specials, both being useful for recovery. Just don't get them mixed up or you may send yourself flying into the danger zone! On top of all that, once he takes 100% damage, Terry enters "Go" mode, allowing him to pull off Super Special moves requiring even more complex inputs. These attacks are nearly as damaging as Terry's Final Smash, where he cancels a series of his Specials into each other, causing all characters in play to drop their jaws in shock.

Not only does Terry have a unique playstyle, but his seemingly sparse stage carries with it an all-new rule set, making it more like a classic 2D fighter. Either side of the battlefield hides invisible walls, allowing you to trap opponents in corners with the right kind of pressure. On other levels, a combo may end after the recipient of the beatdown is knocked out of range, but here you can press them into the wall until it cracks and BANG ZOOM, they're knocked out of the park.

Sakurai also hit a home run with all of Terry's extras. His stage has 20 guest stars from SNK's history who may pop up in the background (excluding fan favorite Mai Shiranui, for two big reasons), and not 20, not 30, but *50* new additions to the soundtrack. In terms of bang for your buck, this DLC is a power-slam dunk! **— JONATHAN**

DLC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, SORA & BANDAI NAMCO RATING: E10+

TOKYO MIRAGE SESSIONS #FE ENCORE

Overlooked and underappreciated on Wii U, a great JRPG gets a second chance on Switch.

ORIGINALLY BILLED AS a crossover between Nintendo's swashbuckling Fire Emblem series and Atlus' demonic Shin Megami Tensei world of RPGs, 2016's Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE ended up being something entirely unexpected. More than any past Nintendo or Atlus title, the game reminds me of bubblegum pop band The Archies and Sugar Sugar, their 1969 hit single. Seemingly shallow but undeniably infectious, the song is largely recognizable today, due in no small part to its strange lineage. Written by the singer/songwriter team of Andy Kim and Jeff Barry, Sugar Sugar was actually performed by completely different vocalists before being billed by a band of comic book personalities from the 1940s. Archie Andrews and his gang of two-dimensional teen heartthrobs were the face of the music – the personas, if you will – while the regular people who were the actual talent were hidden from view. The actual meaning of the song was also heavily covered up, first in a thick layer of superficial pop-rock production, then in a coat of frisky innuendo. You might think that asking listeners to pretend that the cool new song on the radio was being played by a bunch of drawings come to life might be a bridge too far, but nothing could be further from the truth. People liked escaping into a world where familiar faces from their childhood could make a comeback by doing nothing more than singing, dancing and having fun. The artificiality was the point, as it was an escape in and of itself.

In more ways than one, Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE is like that hit tune from the 1960s. It too is covered in superficially pleasing candy colors and attractive cartoon characters from 20 years ago, belying a sincerely strange, sometimes unsettling intersection between fantasy and reality. Teen themes and perspectives abound in both the song and the game, making for some easy parallels. In his comics, music and, now, the hit CW show Riverdale, Archie Andrews is an idealistic everyman who has surrounded himself by extreme personalities from different social cliques (Betty the innocent, Veronica the snob, Moose the musclehead, Reggie the cad). Likewise, the cast of Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE is made up of a similarly iconic bunch, with subdued-but-strong Itsuki Aoi at their center. Make no mistake, this is one emotional, over-the-top group of young adults, stepping into drama at every turn – and while not every lead here is a teenager, most of them sure act like it. Once the story gets rolling, it's easy to forget that this thing was originally pitched as an opportunity for two relatively stoic role-playing games to butt heads.

That was way back in 2013, when Nintendo unveiled a teaser trailer for a game codenamed "Fire Emblem X Shin Megami Tensei." Still images of popular characters from the 20+ year histories of both series flashed on the screen before ending on a shot of the Japanese city skyline, and the moon coming dangerously close to crashing into it. It was clear that worlds were about to collide, but in what way? Would the cast of Fire Emblem end up in Shin Megami Tensei's modern-day Tokyo, like how Pikachu did battle against real-life warlord Oda Nobunaga in Pokémon Conquest? Or would the horrid warlocks from our reality open unholy portals to the more innocent, fantasy world of Marth and company, threatening its doe-eyed heroes with demonic corruption?

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: ATLUS
RELEASE: JANUARY 17, 2020 RATING: T

Even better, why not have both?

In the end, we sort of did. Tokyo Mirage Sessions is less of a battle between two separate game worlds, and more like an amalgamation of both; it's what made the most sense for Nintendo and Atlus at the time. By 2014, it was clear that the Wii U was not going to succeed, and throwing a big-budget RPG with tons of playable characters from two legacy brands at the console would have been a waste. Instead, Atlus and Nintendo changed course and produced something smaller, stranger and more surprising. More importantly, they worked to assure that Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE would be welcoming to everyone, regardless of whether you've played Fire Emblem or Shin Megami Tensei before. So how do you make a game feel like it belongs in two different universes while technically belonging to neither? In this case, Atlus and Nintendo chose to capitalize on a selling point that both Fire Emblem and Shin Megami Tensei have grown to be known for: sex appeal. Both franchises went from cult hits outside of Japan to international bestsellers within a couple of games, and the "waifu" factor had a lot to do with that. Case in point, Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE literally features a character named Tiki=Waifu! (But more about that later).

Like it or not, the game presents the player with voluptuous magical girls and hard-bodied himbos at a breakneck pace, all posing for your approval. In fact, the original game was so overtly sexual that some of the more gratuitous moments were toned down for the Western release. If you're a fan of "that sort of thing" though, don't worry. There's still plenty to gawk at (though for mild-mannered, middle-aged men such as myself, the shots intended to get my blood boiling can feel a little ridiculous.) Blame it on the game's lack of subtlety, my generally restful hormone levels or both, but be warned either way. Like a music video where everyone is shaking around like a bag of nervous Jell-O, there are plenty of times when Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE seems to lose its focus on traditional storytelling in favor of other forms of "plot."

Then again, sexuality is an undeniable part of being a pop star in modern Japan, the central theme of the game. Through most of Itsuki's adventure, your home base is Fortuna Entertainment, a talent agency that secretly fights to exorcise ornery spirits. Most everyone splits their time between pursuing their modeling/acting/singing careers and entering magical worlds called "Idolaspheres" where they battle demonic manifestations of the dark side of the pop music industry. That's where the "sessions" come in. All battles utilize the same strength/weakness categories as Fire Emblem (Axe, Sword, Lance, Bow) while overlapping them with the elemental advantage/disadvantage chart from Shin Megami Tensei (Ice, Fire, Electric, Expel, Force and Death). If you attack an enemy with a weapon and/or element that they're weak against, you can trigger a session, allowing another member of your party with the same weapon or element into a combo attack. Some of these combos end in members of your party throwing down into full-on song and dance numbers. It's amazingly absurd and totally disarming, in more ways than one.

So how did these kids learn to use music and magic together to eradicate evil? It all started five years ago when thousands of people mysteriously disappeared at a massive concert. The only known survivor of this attack is Tsubasa, one of the main characters of the game. She has no memory of how she survived the incident, but it haunts her all the same. Later, she and Itsuki (her platonic bestie) are attacked by demons at a talent audition and dragged into an Idolasphere, when they discover ghostly versions of Fire Emblem's Chrom and Caeda. In this world, they are known as Mirages, and they have the ability to grant humans amazing powers (and over-the-top outfits) after bonding with them. Itsuki and Tsubasa agree to the merger and go on to battle a gaggle of malicious Mirages in their escape to the real world.

Along the way, they learn that humans are being hunted for their "Performa," a creative energy that a force of foul-tempered, leech-like Mirages want to steal. They set about their nefarious plans by possessing various adults in the real world (like

producers and photographers) who lack much soul of their own. Over the course of the next 50-80 hours, our heroes battle those bad apples, meet even more Persona-fied versions of Fire Emblem favorites, work to recover the memories of various amnesiacs, and flirt, flirt, *flirt*. One of those amnesiacs is Tiki, a character from the original Fire Emblem who in this world has become a Hatsune Miku-style virtual idol. She allows you to upgrade your Mirages in various ways, serving as an ongoing link between the real and the unreal.

From the sounds of it, this Switch port of the game will finally make Tiki playable in battle, alongside Fortuna's sultry CEO Maiko Shimazaki and fan-favorite father figure Barry Goodman. There'll also be at least one new dungeon, and a bevy of new songs, story elements and extras, like some stylish new outfits from Fire Emblem: Three Houses.

Finally, TMS#FE may appeal as a way to virtually explore parts of Tokyo – the environments of the game are small and unintimidating, which may be disappointing to those who want a big open-world experience, but for those familiar with the Persona series (a spin-off of Shin Megami Tensei) it will feel right at home. There are plenty of little details that make the sights and sounds of the city feel authentic. Convenience stores have pleasant theme songs, there's no crime in sight and everything feels cleaner and more lovingly crafted than your average Western city. It's all pretty true to the source material, with Shibuya's famous 109 building being one exception. (It's been replaced with the more trademark-friendly 106 building, the home to a special Idolasphere themed around high fashion.) As for Harajuku, it hosts an awesome burger joint and the Illusory Urahara, a purely optional combat-only Idolasphere.

As you walk these Tokyo streets, NPCs are represented with colorful silhouettes, making you feel alone in a crowd of beautiful-yet-distant strangers. That's exactly how I felt in Tokyo the last time I was there, and I look forward to feeling that way again when Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore is released for Switch on January 17. What better way to ring in the new year than with gleeful pop, teen romance and a boatload of demon-slaying? **— JONATHAN**

HE'LL BE THERE FOR YOU
ITSUKI

Though he's not a silent protagonist, Itsuki is more of an avatar for the player than he is the subject of the story of Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE – at least, most of the time. In order for a person to really get into a JRPG, they have to fall in love with their party members, sacrificing their own real-life time and energy to guide them through fictional dungeons and arduous battles, over and over again. This spirit of putting others, both real and imaginary, before himself is what defines Itsuki's personality. Unlike the rest of the group, he has no self-serving aspirations in either the entertainment industry or the hero business. He just wants to support his friends, starting with Tsubasa (who he clearly has a thing for), and then Touma (his hot-headed pal) who are both hustling to land their big break. As their adventure moves forward, Itsuki's social circle expands to include all manner of companions, ranging from mundane to mythical. While he can be hard-headed and skeptical, he's ultimately very accepting. You'd have to be in order to take in all the wild events he dives into! From learning that ghosts and demons are real to taking on the responsibility of saving the world from supernatural conspiracies, Itsuki is asked to roll with inordinately strong punches from the moment the game begins. While relatively slight in build, his strength of character gets him through it all. Of course, it doesn't hurt that during battles, his body is bolstered by the spirit of Chrom, the star of Fire Emblem Awakening, and one of the strongest fighters in the entire FE series!

After fusing with Chrom's Mirage, Itsuki's hair tints blue, a sword materializes in his hands and his clothes transform from standard schoolboy attire to an extravagant suit of magical fabric that would make any Disney prince jealous. That sword is actually Chrom himself, guiding his hand with his years of hard-fought experience. Though initially it feels like Itsuki's growing confidence is just Chrom speaking through him, events later in the story reveal that the boy is more than that. He's not just the proxy for a ghostly warrior or the emotional support manimal for a cast of larger-than-life wannabe superstars. Itsuki is the glue that keeps this group of oddballs together, bound by his resolve to make things better for others. A good leader gets ahead by putting their team first and themselves second. That's Itsuki to a T.

A STAR IS BORN

TSUBASA

From a narrative perspective, Tsubasa is the real star of the game. As the only survivor of the "mysterious disappearance" from five years ago, she was thrust into a sort of celebrity from an early age, as the event became a worldwide cause for speculation and concern. Now 18 years old, she has chosen the life of an entertainer. After all, what's better than putting a smile on people's faces while doing the things you love? At least, that's how she sees it before stumbling into the Mirage of Caeda, one the leads of the original Fire Emblem. In that game, Caeda starts off as a vulnerable princess-turned-warrior, but by the end, she becomes one of Marth's most powerful soldiers (not to mention his fiancée). Fusing with Tsubasa arms them both with a Pegasus Spear, an intensely revealing piece of colorful armor and a set of superhuman skills ranging from flying skewer attacks to full-on song and dance numbers.

BRINGING THE HEAT

TOUMA

If the reasonable Itsuki is the brains of the group, then the fiery Touma is its beating heart. Despite their opposing natures, the two are great friends, with Touma's impulsive urges working to counterbalance Itsuki's measured approach. Confident to a fault, Touma is sure that he will someday star in Masquerider, his favorite TV show, though he has absolutely no idea how to make this happen. He would have never guessed that joining with Fire Emblem's red-hot lancer Cain would be part of his path to stardom. In his original games, Cain is usually partnered with Abel, a green knight who fights with similar style and strength. Here, Abel plays a very different role – one that ultimately changes Touma's concept of heroism. When fused with Cain, Touma gains a magical chain-spear, a revealing red jacket and matching chaps. A perfect visual metaphor for a flamboyant, jump-first-ask-questions-later powerhouse!

KEEPING IT COOL

KIRIA

Where Touma is boiling over with heat, Kiria is cool as ice. An established idol at age 21, she's the oldest in the group, sometimes appearing to be above it all – to the point where it's not always clear who or what she cares about. In time, though, that cold exterior begins to thaw, revealing more insecurities than anyone would have guessed. Fire Emblem Awakening's Tharja is her Mirage, and as anyone familiar with her knows, that lady doesn't play it subtle. In Awakening's Japanese release, she even showed off her bikini bottoms, something that NOA changed before releasing the game in the states. Fusing with Tharja gives Kiria a skimpy outfit, a battle staff that doubles as a microphone and an ominous black mask that covers half her face. If Tsubasa is the team's sweetness, then Kiria is the sour. Put them together and their saucy performances have enough punch to bowl over any crowd, demonic or otherwise.

AN AMBITIOUS ACTRESS

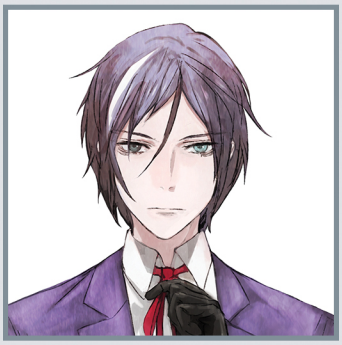
ELEONORA

This Hollywood-obsessed 16-year-old thinks she has it all figured out, though there are times when her emotions catch even her by surprise. Born from Scandanavian and Japanese parents, her blonde hair and exotic features have always made her an outsider in urban Tokyo, but she sees herself as special, not different. Already a successful actress, she stars in the popular TV show Dandelion in Love, playing a high school girl who adores the idea of falling in love. The irony is, real-life Eleonora puts her career before her love life almost every time. Fusing with Virion from Fire Emblem Awakening provides her with a mystical bow that fires arrows of light. The problem is, Virion can be quite the elitist in his own right. A former Duke, he has some pretty intense ideas about what a lady should be. He believes Eleonora should work to meet those standards, while she'd much rather put her all into becoming the next J-Law.

A SMART 5TH GRADER

MAMORI

Mamori is only 11 years old, making her part in the life-or-death struggles of Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE a sign of both her immense courage as well as proof that none of the adults in the game know the meaning of the words "child endangerment." The star of the TV show Microwave Idol Mamorin, she adheres to classic Japanese values like wearing a kimono, respecting her elders and always remaining humble. In battle, she defies those traditions by fusing with Fire Emblem's Draug, who shields her in a massive suit of bell-shaped armor before presenting her with a giant battle axe. She actually inherited Draug from Barry Goodman, a 35-year-old American who once was a star in a world famous heavy metal band. Both the man and the Mirage are big, bulky lunks who just want to protect those in need – though in the end, it may just be Mamori who ends up doing the saving!



A RIVAL TO REFORM

YASHIRO

The only male vocalist in the party, Yashiro stands out in more ways than one. In fact, he is actively hostile toward the group for many hours of the game, treating them all like failures! A master of stage and screen, he is a perfectionist in every way, applying harsh standards to everyone – especially himself – in an effort to weed out flaws and hone natural talents. In time, Itsuki and the gang help him to redevelop his most important strength of all: his humanity. (Though that doesn't exactly happen overnight.) After fusing with Fire Emblem's Navarre, he dons a red visor, silver helmet, random leather straps and a long, thin, red sword. In his original games, Navarre was known as "The Crimson Fencer," and only showed signs of compassion when a woman was in danger. He's the perfect accompaniment to Yashiro's role as the game's "dark rival." He's essentially the Reggie/Sephiroth to Itsuki's Archie/Cloud.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MONOLITH SOFT
RELEASE: TBA 2020 RATING: T

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES: DEFINITIVE EDITION

The adventure expands with the addition of a previously cut area!

BACK IN SEPTEMBER, a Nintendo Direct gave us a small trailer announcing Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition, a remaster of a masterpiece that utilized the Wii masterfully, was visually stunning and had a stellar narrative. Now it looks even more amazing! Though we only got a brief look, it stirred up some major commotion among fans excited for the graphical upgrade.

Most intriguing, though, was the last shot of the trailer — which teased an area of the Xenoblade game world previously known only to those fans who'd gone disc diving to find secrets and cut content still lurking in the game code: the Bionis' Shoulder. This area only appeared in a handful of cutscenes in the original game, so to see Shulk and Melia in the shot above from the trailer standing on a precipice — perhaps ready to actually explore the never-before-explorable land before them — is potentially huge news. The Monado in that same scene also looks different, and we can see Alcamoth in the distance when the shot pans. (Naturally, Nintendo offered no explanation or confirmation!)

Xenoblade Chronicles is full of amazingly large areas — you really have to remind yourself that this game originally appeared on the Wii! Each area you explore has a deep connection to the story, has its own ecosystem, has a ton of sidequests, makes sense visually with where it appears on the Bionis and is connected with other areas. Theorists believe that the Shoulder area would have connected Frontier Village (where the Nopon live) to the Eryth Sea (where the High Entia reside), which makes sense when taking things in overall. Nobody knows why this area was cut, as much of it was finished and is explorable with the right computer setup. In fact, the bottom two shots on this page are from intrepid fan explorers who found the area and shared it online! It is mysteriously fleshed out, even containing chests, waterfalls, an elaborate cave system, bridges and a city. The housing structures found here imply that another race of beings built them, as the units appear nowhere else in the game and are visually unique. *Did we miss out on an entire people?!* Perhaps these are the Low Entia, or something else entirely. As a member of each race joins Shulk's party, it could have massive implications to the gameplay and narrative. Conversely, it could just be the original abandoned settlement of the High Entia, or an offshoot of the Nopon tribe. The fact that the imperial city Alcamoth lies nearby is not a coincidence, and even Dunban's house has a photo of the area, so a Homs connection could be there as well. If it is true, new enemies and armor are almost a given, and it must also be suggested that with each new area comes new music — and the music is so evocative and ethereal in this masterpiece that I can't wait to know more!

This is all conjecture at this point, but with such a huge potential addition to the game looming, fans are wondering what else the developers have in store for us in this version. The Mechonis could hold new areas as well! Only the folks at Monolith Soft know for sure, but the not knowing is almost as fun as exploring the new area will be! We'll all find out once a date is attached to the project, as a nebulous "2020" flashed on the screen to close the trailer. **— BRETT**

METROID PRIME 4

Samus gets an assist from Master Chief('s artist).

CAN WE TALK about Prime 4 for a minute? I know, I know.

It's been a while since Metroid Prime 3: Corruption: over 12 years, in fact! Retro Studios forged their legacy with the trailblazing Prime series, then continued their win streak with their resurrection of Donkey Kong Country for a new generation. Now they've come back full circle with Metroid Prime 4. Wait, you thought a mystery developer (thought to be Bandai Namco) was responsible? Nope, that all changed about a year ago when Nintendo decided it was time to bring the home team back!

That's not all they changed, as Shinya Takahashi of Nintendo's EPD division decided that Metroid Prime 4 needed more time in the oven, and hit it with a delay (you know, because they probably had to restart from scratch). Another E3 has since come and gone and still there's been no sign of Prime 4 footage — or any amount of substantial updates, plot descriptions, anything. Nintendo did list it as "TBA" in a very recent financial report, so that's good news!

So why are we justifying another Metroid Prime 4 update here? Well, there's news! Kind of. Retro Studios has hired Kyle Hefley, who previously worked on the Halo series, as a lead character artist. We don't know if he's even working on Prime 4 yet (as Nintendo is keeping any and all info under lock and key), but we can likely count on a touch of Halo making its way into Metroid Prime 4. I'm sure anyone who wasn't a fan of Other M's character designs will be pleased.

Metroid, at present, is in a very weird spot. We had Samus Returns in 2017 from MercurySteam, which was quite literally a return to old-school form, and by all accounts was a critical and respectable financial success. But it's been over two years since then and we haven't heard anything about a follow-up. And, in reality, Samus Returns was a take on the already existing Metroid II — highlighting that Nintendo was still pensive about continuing the series with a true narrative follow-up.

Alas, we're left daydreaming what Metroid Prime 4 will bring to the table. The good news is that Nintendo is focused on quality and Retro hasn't let us down yet. All we have to do now is wait. **— CHRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS
RELEASE: TBA RATING: RP

FAMICOM TANTEI CLUB

Will this gorgeous glow-up get localized?

DO YOU LOVE solving grisly murders? Then you'll want to polish your magnifying glass, ready your interrogation notepad . . . and it wouldn't hurt if you spoke fluent Japanese. As Nintendo is remaking the two Famicom Tantei Club murder mysteries for the Switch!

Originally released for the Famicom Disk System in 1987, Famicom Tantei Club has you, an amateur detective, piecing together your broken memories in order to solve a series of grisly murders. The victims are all heirs to a significant family fortune, and the killer is still on the loose.

In the second game, you must discover the link between the murder of a local schoolgirl and the 20-year-old ghost story of "The Girl Who Stands Behind" that she was investigating for the school paper.

We haven't seen much yet, other than some cutscenes and early dialogue. Development is being carried out by Mages, who are bringing the static 8-bit scenarios to life with fully animated characters and detailed environments to hunt for clues in. The second game was previously remade in 1997 for the Super Famicom with incredible cinematic illustrations, and it appears as if that style will be making a return for both games.

While Mages is on development and art duties, the remakes are spearheaded by the original scenario writer, Yoshio Sakamoto (of Metroid fame).

It's not yet clear whether the games will be released together or separately, packaged or as a digital download. Either way, the chances of a Western release seem slim, which is a shame, as Tantei Club features some of the best storytelling in Nintendo's library. Cross your fingers for a localization! **— MARK**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MAGES
RELEASE: TBA 2020 (IN JAPAN)
RATING: RP

BRAVELY DEFAULT II

Bravely's third isn't a sequel to Second?

WHILE MOST NINTENDO fans were hoping for a fresh Breath of the Wild 2 trailer, some Metroid info or the reveal of the fifth Smash Bros. Fighters Pass character at the 2019 Game Awards, Nintendo held back on all those possibilities in favor of throwing us a curveball: the surprise announcement that Bravely Default is getting a new sequel on the Switch!

I'll admit, I did a double take and had to think for a second when the name "Bravely Default II" appeared on the screen. Wasn't there already a second Bravely Default? Well yes. Yes there was. It was called Bravely Second: End Layer, and it launched in the States in 2016, two years after Bravely Default came our way in 2014. It was even a direct narrative follow-up to the first game, featuring the same characters from the first, many of the same locations to explore and a battle system that was pretty much an echo as well.

So what are we supposed to read into the fact that they're calling this next one Bravely Default II? The cast of characters is totally different, and they'll be questing across a totally new world too, according to Nintendo's PR. So I guess this is a numbered sequel in the Final Fantasy sense, where a new numeral means everything else is new too?

We've been left to wonder about that for the moment — but we shouldn't have too long to wait until we get new details, as the game has already been pegged for a 2020 release. In the meanwhile, JRPG fans who missed the first two Bravelys may want to revisit them on 3DS to brush up — they offer streamlined, modern takes on old-school JRPG tropes, as well as convenient options like being able to remove all enemy encounters if you want to just explore freely. Most unique are the "Default" and "Brave" options in battle, which let you store extra attacks for future turns, or unleash a bunch up front! Surely those will return. **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
RELEASE: TBA 2020 RATING: RP

NO MORE HEROES III

Just how much crazier can this series get?

ALSO LAYING CLAIM to a chunk of the 3.5 hour running time of Geoff Keighley's The Game Awards 2019 was a fresh trailer for No More Heroes III . . . though it spent 98% of its runtime trying to fool the audience into thinking it was some other game instead!

The video presented itself first and foremost as an old 4:3 ratio anime movie — a heartwarming tale about a young boy who meets an injured alien in a forest, takes him home secretly to nurse him back to health, then returns with him to the site of his crashed ship and works to build a new rocket back to outer space alongside his fuzzy little extraterrestrial pal. Like an anime take on E.T.! . . . But then, why is that little alien guy trying to eat the family dog? His grin looks a little sinister, too . . .

The alien, Fu, promises the boy, Damon, that he'll come back to Earth in 20 years. He then blasts off, leaving Damon behind — though not without something to remember him by, as Damon is infused with Fu's alien power before he departs.

Two decades later, the tale picks back up with an adult Damon as a rich businessman, having built an empire for himself with the help of Fu's otherworldly alien abilities. Fu then reappears, true to his word — but he's no longer a cute little fuzz-faced child. He's a full-grown humanoid adult flanked by a posse of alien outlaws, and his true nature as a villain is fully unveiled when he declares his intent to take over the Earth!

Again, all throughout this trailer there was no indication that it was anything but a new, original game. But finally, at the very end, Travis Touchdown bursts into the scene — meaning all that backstory was meant to set up the antagonists for our saber-wielding hero's next adventure! Travis has beaten the best fighters on Earth, but how will he fare against intergalactic foes? We'll get to see soon! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE RELEASE: TBA 2020
RATING: RP (BUT WILL BE "M" FOR SURE)

SNACK WORLD: THE DUNGEON CRAWL – GOLD

Finally making the trip from Japan!

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: LEVEL-5
RELEASE: FEBRUARY 14, 2020
RATING: T

SOMEONE AT LEVEL-5 has been hoarding all the snacks — but not for much longer!

The creators of multimedia franchises such as the Professor Layton and Yo-kai Watch series have been working their magic again. Back in 2017, The Snack World: Trejarers was released on the Nintendo 3DS in Japan, with a port arriving on Switch the following year. But for us in the West? We saw nothing, and were left starving.

But no more! The Snack World, which now encompasses two manga adaptations, an anime and a toyline, is finally making its way to the West, where it will hopefully sate appetites the world over in Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl - Gold on the Nintendo Switch.

The game itself takes the form of a roguelike RPG set in a world that combines high fantasy and high tech. As one of the treasure hunters, Chup or Mayonna, you awaken at the gates of Tutti-Frutti with amnesia, and soon find your goal is to beat back the monstrous malcontent who ran roughshod over your humble hometown: the sinister Sultan Vinegar. But for a foe as famished for fiendishness as this, that was but an appetizer; the main course is awakening the dastardly Deodragon, Smorg Asbord.

It's dangerous to go alone, however, but the game's titular snack attack can summon squadmates to your side — or you can bring along up to three real-life friends who are also hungry for adventure, thanks to the four-player co-op mode.

If you're a fan of character customization, then you're in luck. Not only can convenience stores provide you with a variety of Jaras (weapons, shields, status buffs and tonics) and Snacks (tradeable snapshots of characters and creatures you can summon to your side), but you'll be able to tweak the main character's hair, mouth, eyes and so on into something suitably *you* before setting off on your journey.

As a roguelike RPG, gathering loot is definitely a part of the menu, and that holds true here as you delve deep into the depths of destinations such as the Shrine of Shishkebob. The more you manage to achieve in the randomized quests, the more chests you'll receive in return, with varying conditions and ultra-rare items spicing up the mix.

If that's not enough for you, there are also sidequests that will allow you to prove your heroic chops to all, far and wide. Pop culture and puns collide as you lend a hand to the grill — er, *girl* group known as the Spicy Galz and awaken Sloe White, while other quests involve such beings as a "vegetabull-dog" and a "crock ness monster."

The visual style for the game is notably distinct, looking like something one might expect to see on Nicktoons (CG that has a slight Claymation vibe), while the opening carries a distinctly anime flavor, resulting in an interesting blend. Speaking of which, the holdup in releasing the game may have been to coincide with the English release of the anime, which debuted with three episodes at Anime Expo 2019.

Those who are already familiar with the game from reading about its Japanese release will be pleased to know that the Gold version includes all of the expansion packs and downloadable content from the Japanese release, with no need to spend further gold on your part.

Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl - Gold will be available on Valentine's Day, February 14, 2010. Will you fall in love with it? **— DAVID**

PERSONA 5 SCRAMBLE: THE PHANTOM STRIKERS

The Phantom Thieves' next adventure is much more than just a Musou!

WHEN IT WAS first revealed to the world last April, Persona 5 Scramble: The Phantom Strikers seemed to fit neatly inside the box Omega Force had already built for the Legend of Zelda and Fire Emblem franchises, when both of those series got the "Musou" treatment and we got Hyrule Warriors and Fire Emblem Warriors, respectively. But the Phantom Thieves refuse to be restrained! In the months since we last saw it in action, the developers hard at work on this Persona 5 sequel story have expanded its scope and scale, blowing past the prior boundaries set by those previous games. It's no wonder this game isn't named Persona Warriors! It's become something else altogether!

That's not to say the core focus of the gameplay has been altered. As in those past crossover adventures headlined by the likes of Link and Marth, Joker and his friends will primarily deal with their opponents in massive real-time battles, hacking and slashing through dozens and even hundreds of foes at a time with a wild array of over-the-top, flashy attacks. But while the Warriors games were content to rinse-and-repeat that kind of action over and over again to fill whole campaigns, Scramble is mixing things up.

For starters, not every gameplay moment is spent in battle. As in the original Persona 5, you'll also control Joker's normal human self as he goes about his life as a teenager living in Tokyo. You'll get to explore areas previously seen in the first game, as well as new parts of the city – and places beyond, too! While Tokyo remains the primary prowling ground for the Phantom Thieves, they'll also hit the road to visit other cities in Japan to see what mischief they can make there as well.

They'll even spend some time off the clock entirely, enjoying their summer vacation. That's when this tale takes place, picking up the story a few months after the conclusion of the events of Persona 5. According to the developers, they wanted to give the cast of characters some R&R time in this game as a reward for their hard work facing all the challenges they overcame in that first game.

When they're finished working on their tans and swimming in the sea, though, it'll be back to work taking on armies of deadly demons. The Thieves' downtime luckily hasn't separated them from the spirits they're able to summon to help them in battle – the titular Personas return, and their presence introduces one of Scramble's fundamental gameplay differences when compared with earlier Musou designs. When called upon, the Persona of each hero will freeze time – all enemies on the battlefield will stop in their tracks, giving you as much time as you need to navigate a menu of Skill attacks and choose which one you want your Persona to unleash. These crowd-clearing assault techniques can cover huge areas in front of your fighter, and you'll be able to rotate and place the area-of-effect targeting cursor in the best possible position before letting it rip.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ATLUS DEVELOPERS: OMEGA FORCE & P-STUDIO RELEASE: TBA RATING: RP

Each Phantom Thief has a Persona to call upon: Ryuji's partner Captain Kidd is a powerhouse pirate; Morgana teams up with none other than the literary legend Zorro. But Joker retains his signature ability to wield multiple Personas, making him the most versatile in any fight. (There's a reason he's the leader of the team!) When you're playing as Joker, you'll get to browse through a whole list of possible Personas and attacks to choose the right one for each situation. What's more, you'll be able to recruit more as the game goes on, and then also fuse Personas together to form more powerful allies.

Still not enough? Each Persona has one final super-charged "Showtime" attack that summons a wild cinematic cutscene and mows through basically every baddie in view. (You won't be able to use it all the time, of course.)

Also mixing things up? The fact that you can swap to play as a different character on the fly through a Baton Pass system. (Useful if you current Thief runs low on HP.) These characters are like family, and they fight best as a group! Even if you don't actively swap to direct control of your allies, you can still call them in for All-Out Attacks to gang up on foes and beat the snot out of them together.

Movement is more dynamic! Older Musou games locked battlefield movement down to just running from one fight to the next, but in Scramble the Thieves display an agility that rivals Spider-Man. Joker and his pals can leap to the tops of streetlights or take refuge on top of a nearby bus for a bit, then descend back down to ground level with an extra flourish for bonus damage to the enemy crowd.

Some gameplay sequnces will alter the feel of movement entirely, as you'll skulk along in the shadows (as thieves often do) and set yourself up for sneak attacks on unsuspecting enemies from behind. There are infiltrations into enemy territory, and even sidescrolling segments! Whoever thought we'd control Joker like we do Super Mario — and who could have further predicted such a thing would be introduced in what was thought at first to just be another "Warriors" game?

Truly, Persona 5 Scramble is going to be something special, and it's tops on my radar already. While it hasn't been officially announced for the West yet, it's set to debut on Switch and PS4 in Japan on February 20 — hopefully we'll get a localization announcement soon thereafter. (If not before!) In the meanwhile, I once again recommend playing the first Persona 5 game (even though it seems a Switch port may not ever appear for it). If you'd like to just get caught up with the story, though, check out Persona 5: The Animation, the anime series that retells all the events from the game! **— LUCAS**

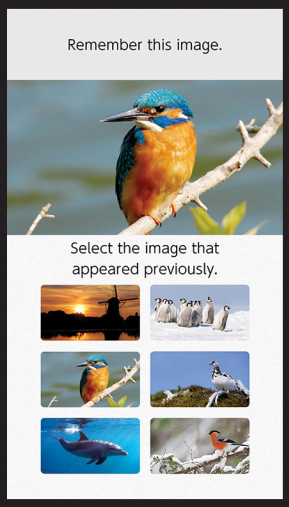
THE NEWEST MEMBER OF THE TEAM
SOPHIA

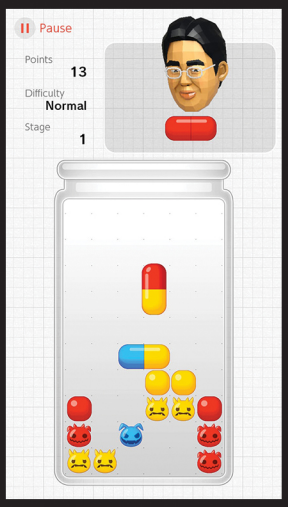
You'd think that a group that calls themselves the Phantom Thieves would be a little more secretive and exclusive, but all throughout the events of Persona 5, the gang just keeps expanding again and again with new friends jumping into the action and awakening their own Persona powers. And so it seems the trend will continue as the narrative carries on into Persona 5 Scramble!

Say hello to Sophia, the newest recruit helping Joker and his friends steal hearts and beat down baddies. This cheerful girl with hearts for hair is encountered early on in the story of Scramble, and she'll serve as a central figure in how the tale unfolds. What mysteries lie behind that friendly smile?

Not just a story character, though, Sophia leaps into action directly as a playable hero right alongside the rest of the team. In her Phantom Thief form, she goes by the code name "Sophie" . . . which, OK, is not the most creative choice. (You thought it was silly when Morgana picked the code name Mona? Here comes Sophia, who apparently thinks her true identity will be sufficiently obscured if she alters just one letter.) Well, localization could always change that.

Anyway! In battle, Sophia/Sophie dual-wields a pair of wicked, whirling yo-yos, putting Ness, Mike Jones and Captain Rainbow to shame with her serious skills. She's also armed with a blaster. (Blast it! I forgot to mention that earlier as another difference from past Musous . . . all the heroes have time-stopping guns in this game too.) And while Sophia doesn't have her own Persona, exactly, she apparently has a partner called a "Pithos" that functions similarly. That's another mystery!





DR. KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING FOR NINTENDO SWITCH

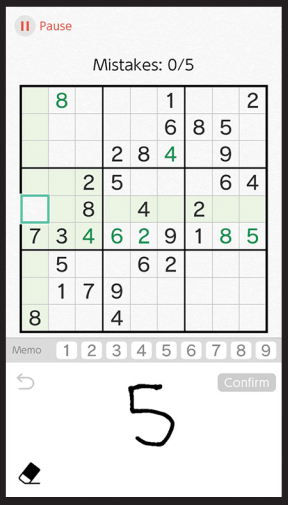
Time to re-check the age of your brain.

IT'S HARD TO overstate just how important Brain Age was to the success of the Nintendo DS. Its hovering head of a host, Dr. Kawashima, was essentially the new R.O.B. – selling the idea that the DS was more than just a run-of-the-mill games console. Now, the good doctor is returning with a new title that brings back a lot of the same content from the original. Players engage in quick, easy mental challenges, solving simple math or literacy puzzles that are never too strenuous, but engaging enough to tax the player's brain.

The promised return of older challenges from previous games is no bad thing – after all, these puzzles are just as engaging today as they were 15 years ago. It's also nice, though, to see some new gameplay modes that take advantage of the Switch system's unique hardware. For example, players can hold up their hands to the Joy-Con's IR motion camera in order to play Rock/Paper/Scissors against the AI.

As with the original Brain Age, it looks like this new game will be perfect for those who want to sharpen their minds. It'll also be useful for those trying to bridge the generation gap with older family members, as you can prove to grandma that video games are a productive use of her time!

As of this writing, the game is only confirmed for Japan and Europe, as "Brain Training." We await word on an American release! **– MATTHEW L.**



SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: TBA
RATING: RP

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS OF COLD STEEL III

Falcom's coming through for Switch owners!

IS FALCOM FINALLY seeing the light?

Nihon Falcom is one of the game industry's oldest studios still in operation at this point, having been founded all the way back in March of 1981. (That's even older than me, if you can believe it!) But through nearly all of that nearly 39-year run, the company's stayed small. A few dozen employees have carried the name for decades. Recently, that's had an impact when it comes to their development for the Switch – in interviews, representatives of the studio have expressed their desire to bring more projects to Nintendo's newest console, but then they've lamented the fact that they just don't have the manpower to pull off ports of their PlayStation releases.

. . . Until now, I suppose? Just recently Falcom's tune seemed to change, as the company unveiled a plan for The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel III to make the switch to Switch. Its localization just went on sale in the States on PS4 this past October, putting its planned Spring 2020 Nintendo debut only half a year later.

I'm not sure what it was that changed behind the scenes to get Falcom to commit to more Switch work, but perhaps they're finally ready to move on from Sony's Vita as their portable platform of choice and Nintendo's got the only viable new alternative. Whatever the reason, I'm thrilled, as this surely means a higher likelihood of Ys IX coming to the Switch as well!

Trails of Cold Steel III, by the way, deserves attention from the JRPG faithful among our readers. Though visually similar to the Ys series' most recent installments, Trails keeps its combat turn-based and much more traditional.

NIS America's going all-out for the release, even prepping a hefty "Thors Academy Edition" bundled with a steelbook, an art book, a set of postcards, a soundtrack CD and a cute Mishy plushie! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM
RELEASE: SPRING 2020 RATING: T

WILL 2020 FINALLY BE THEIR YEAR?

Touching base with four projects in progress that could potentially see the light of day in 2020 – if we're lucky, that is!

BAYONETTA 3

WE HAVEN'T SEEN anything new from PlatinumGames on this one since it was first announced in 2017! More worrisome still, Yusuke Hashimoto, director of Bayonetta 2, was presumably working on it . . . then he left the company. Not a good sign! On the encouraging side, Astral Chain did well in August, and Platinum's Atsushi Inaba told fans at E3 2019 that Bayonetta 3 is "going to be a high quality title and we're putting our all into it." Fingers crossed for the witch-in-a-hairsuit's smashing return in 2020! **– JONATHAN**

MEGA MAN X9?

WITH MEGA MAN 11 now a done deal, fans of the Blue Bomber are eagerly awaiting word of what comes next from Capcom. Hope is that the same team will revive the Mega Man X series, but as of this writing, that remains to be seen (though it wouldn't surprise us if some special livestream took place soon to make the announcement, perhaps at the franchise concert in January). Whatever the case, Capcom Taiwan is also doing their own thing with the brand on mobile with Rockman X DiVE, which is slated for a worldwide release in the future. **– DAVID**

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI V

WHAT A TIMELY joy it would have been to be able to present some new information on this upcoming adventure in a fresh preview, here in this Tokyo-themed magazine – seeing as how the upcoming Shin Megami Tensei V, like the several installments in its series before it, is set to take place in a post-apocalyptic Tokyo. But that's still just about the extent of the information we have on the game, which was first revealed to exist almost exactly three years ago, in January 2017, through a brief teaser trailer that played as part of the hype-inducing pre-Switch launch Direct that set up the debut of our favorite hybrid console/handheld in March that year. While the Switch has soared since . . . SMTV? Silent. **– LUCAS**

PIKMIN 4!?!?

FINALLY, ANOTHER FLIP of the calendar year gives us another chance to wonder just what in the world is going on with Pikmin 4. Should Nintendo stay silent on it for just a few more months, we'll hit *half a decade* since Mr. Miyamoto first revealed the project's existence in July 2015! Of course, Nintendo is perfectly welcome to go ahead and reconfirm its development before we hit that ignoble milestone. Perhaps with a trailer? Some gameplay footage? *A single piece of old concept art!?!?* We'll take anything at this point. Please, Big N! **– LUCAS**

TOKYO E YŌKOSO!

Your introduction to the city that serves as the center of Japanese culture – and video game culture, too!

BY TONY PONCE!

Geeks! Nerds! Basement dwellers! Your Asian oasis awaits! Anyone with even a passing interest in anime or video games knows that Akihabara is *the* otaku Mecca, littered with all manner of figurine shops and maid cafés. But don't let the bright lights of Tokyo's "Electric Town" prevent you from making rational fiscal decisions! Businesses along the main roads catch the most attention from passersby, therefore their merchandise is tailored to the broadest tastes. And since shop owners are well aware of Akihabara's reputation among foreign travelers, they know they can get away with charging more than their wares are worth. For the best deals, don't be afraid to explore the unassuming side alleys!

AKIHABARA

An artificial island originally constructed during Japan's Edo period as a defense against nautical invaders, Odaiba stands today as a brilliant showcase of modern architecture – and is my personal favorite area in all of Tokyo! From the Oedo Onsen Monogatari hot springs theme park to the Palette Town shopping and entertainment center (no, that isn't a Pokémon reference), finding a reason not to spend the full day here can be a challenge. You also can't miss the giant Gundam statue or the beautiful Rainbow Bridge that illuminates the skyline at night with multicolor majesty. (And for fans of the Digimon anime, Odaiba is also the home of the DigiDestined from the first two seasons!)

ODAIBA

SHINJUKU

Here's how your Shinjuku expedition follows: Emerge from Shinjuku Station, the busiest train station on the planet, and into Tokyo's economic core where major companies such as Square Enix are headquartered. Escape the madness by visiting the famous Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, or enjoy the dazzling Christmas lighting showcase during the winter. But after hours? That's when nightlife thrill-seekers venture into the Kabukichō district, a thriving ecosystem of tiny pubs frequented by drunken salarymen with stories to share, hostess clubs for the money-laden romantic . . . and certain seedy establishments that may or may not be run by the Yakuza!

SHIBUYA

No image captures the essence of modern Japan quite like the sight of hundreds of pedestrians bustling across the famous scramble intersection outside Shibuya Station. It's a microcosm of Japanese society and the frightening efficiency they employ in their daily campaign to mitigate the impact of overcrowding. And just beyond that? A whole lot of shopping! Shibuya is one the nation's great commercial centers, with the tree-lined thoroughfare Omotesandō populated by many high-end clothing chains. Wander off the main streets and you'll enter Harajuku, the heart of urban youth culture and the eye-searing kawaii fashion that dominates many a conversation about Japanese weirdness.

If you're making the trip all the way to Tokyo, then you might as well pay the Emperor a visit at the Imperial Palace in Chiyoda and thank him for his hospitality, right? Well, scratch that thought from your mind, 'cause it ain't happening – the western half of the grounds is reserved as the private residence of the Emperor and his family. Even if you can't score an audience with the big man himself, you can still wander amongst the spirits of past monarchs in the Imperial Palace East Gardens! The Palace as a whole is situated on the site of the former Edo Castle, but due to destruction by fires, earthquakes and bombing raids and subsequent reconstruction and renovation efforts, little evidence of the old structures remains. The East Gardens, which have been open to the public since 1968, encompass the former inner and outer defensive circles, known as the Honmaru and Ninomaru respectively. Instead of fortified installations, however, you'll now find a wide lawn leading up to the foundation of the old castle tower and a well-maintained garden of tranquil beauty. I'm sure some tourists visit the East Gardens to brush up on their Japanese history, but I gather most simply desire a respite from the chaos of Tokyo – a patch of green in a concrete jungle. Several such gardens and parks are scattered throughout the city, each with their own charms. There's Ueno Park and its zoo that's been in operation since the late 19th century, Shiba Park situated just beside Tokyo Tower and many others. You're never too far from the soft rustling of leaves or the gentle babbling of winding streams!

IMPERIAL PALACE

Japan may be a secular country, but that doesn't mean the Japanese don't value Shinto and Buddhist teachings and incorporate them into their daily lives. From the tiniest shrines to the busiest temples, you're always within walking distance of a station of reflection and prayer. In the heart of Shibuya, shielded from the roar of traffic by a thick forest, is Meiji Jingu, a Shinto shrine dedicate to Emperor Meiji, the 122nd Emperor of Japan, and his wife Empress Shōken. What strikes me most about the complex isn't the shrine itself, but the massive walls of sake and wine barrels, donated for use in various ceremonies! (In case you were curious, the barrels on display are actually empty.)

MEIJI JINGU

YOYOGI PARK

Just south of Meiji Jingu is Yoyogi Park – the first major park I visited on my initial Tokyo odyssey. Greeting me at the entrance was a crew of street musicians, followed by an array of stamina-restoring snack vendors. Weary wanderers sat around the edge of a long pool dotted with dozens of water spouts, while children laughed and played in the open space ahead. Also, I kid you not, a crow about a foot and a half long landed on the drinking fountain right in front of me and proceeded to take a dip as though I weren't even there! I sadly didn't cover much ground during my stay, but had I continued onward I would have discovered multiple athletic fields and a cycling course with rental bikes available!

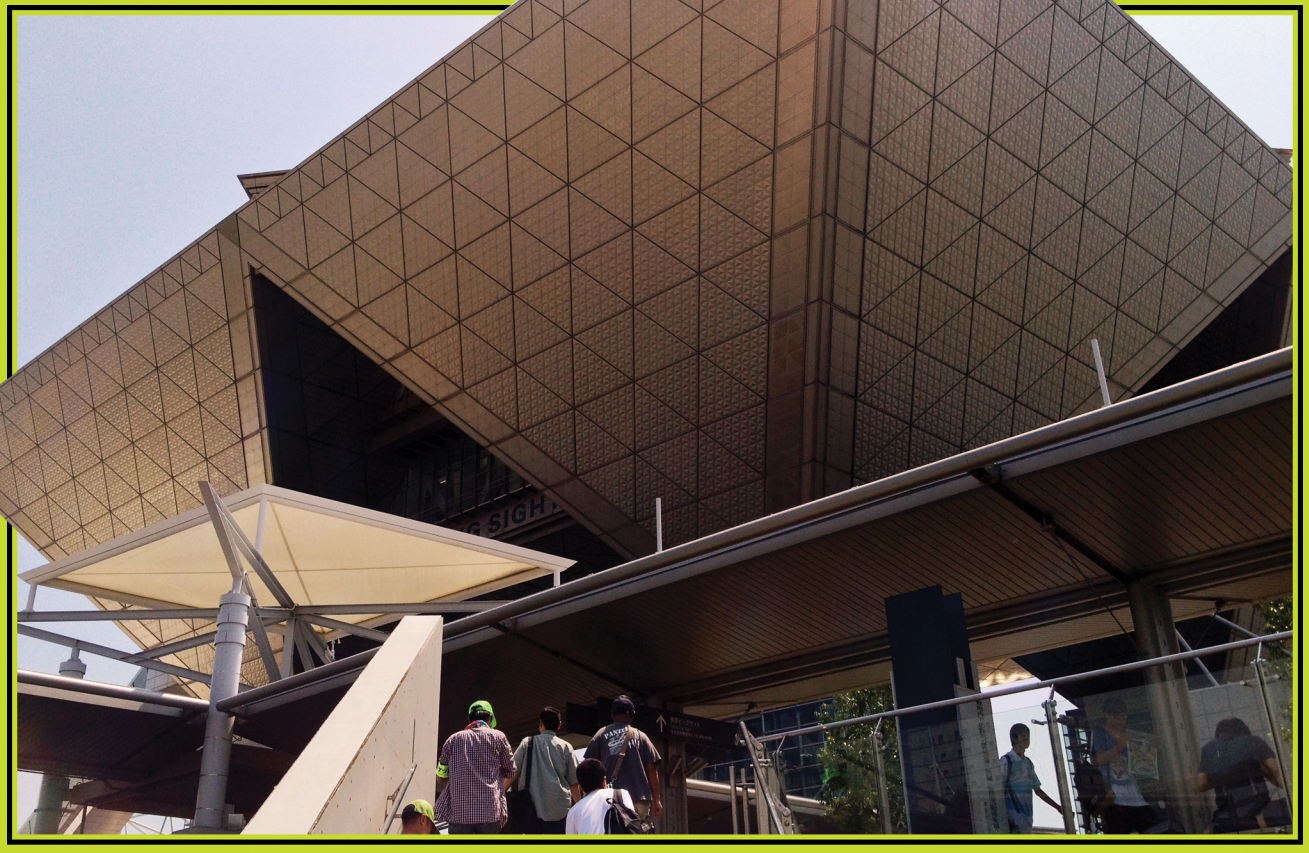
Taking a moment out of your hectic day to offer prayers is supposed to be a relaxing excursion. But how can anyone be expected to find their spiritual center when everyone is packed together so tightly!? Such is the concern when planning a trek to Asakusa and the Buddhist temple Sensōji, the oldest temple in all of Tokyo. Situated along the path to the temple are the Kaminarimon ("Thunder Gate") and the Hōzōmon ("Treasure-House Gate"), and sandwiched between the two gates is a strip of dozens of shops selling all kinds of snacks and trinkets to commemorate your visit. With thousands of daily visitors, it isn't the most zen pilgrimage, but hey, thriving tourism helps maintain the temple!

SENSŌJI

In case you haven't noticed, Tokyo is bursting with people – nearly 14,000,000 in just the city proper before considering tourists or the wider metropolitan population. People here do their best, but sometimes no amount of patience can make the situation bearable. Behold Tokyo Big Sight, an exhibition center with a most awesome inverted pyramid conference tower. Twice a year, it hosts Comiket ("Comic Market"), a massive convention for independent manga authors to hawk their works. During my experience during Summer Comiket 2016, there was a queue at least 20 people wide out in the blistering Japanese summer heat, wrapping around the venue *twice*, waiting for the doors to open! Gah!

CROWDS

TOKYO BIG SIGHT



There was a time when Tokyo Tower was *the* destination for visitors who desired a bird's eye view of the city. Then Tokyo Skytree opened in 2012, and no one gave that Eiffel Tower wannabe another glance! Measuring a whopping 634 meters (or 2,080.1 feet), this newer broadcast tower is the second tallest structure in the world, bested only by the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. Given the limited space on the observation deck, wait times can stretch for hours on end, though foreign passport holders have the option to skip the line for a higher fare. It's worth it to eat the extra cost! You won't realize how vast Tokyo actually is until you witness its full 360° panoramic glory! (There are also several TV and anime merch shops on Skytree's lower levels to help you return to equilibrium after descending from the heavens!)

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

TOKYO SKYTREE

As the largest city in Japan, Tokyo sports a hefty variety of choice dining. Satisfy your seafood cravings at the Tsukiji Fish Market, dive into hole-in-the-wall bars for delectable pub cuisine or partake in Instagram-worthy pancakes and pastries! Contrary to certain Japan travel rumors, you don't have to break the bank to enjoy a high-class meal. Consider the bowl of tasty comfort in the photo above. That's not just any ol' ramen, but spicy tantanmen from Nakiryu, a Michelin star-awarded noodle shop in Toshima! The wait to enter is at least an hour long, but the prices are comparable to most in-and-out ramen joints. Can't say no to gourmet cuisine on a college student's budget! *Itadakimasu!*

DINING

Japan has successfully turned companionship into big business – I can't think of any other country that allows you to rent friends or even entire fake families for hours or days at a time! Want to make friends of a furrier persuasion? Then go to an animal café, where instead of coffee and donuts, you purchase time to observe and play with a collection of domesticated critters. There are cafés for dogs, cats, owls, rabbits and even hedgehogs, if you can believe it. Just this past spring, a place called Mipig Café opened in Meguro, granting guests the privilege of getting cozy with adorable micro pigs! Ambling about a large city can be lonely, so spots like these are perfect for refreshing your heart and soul!

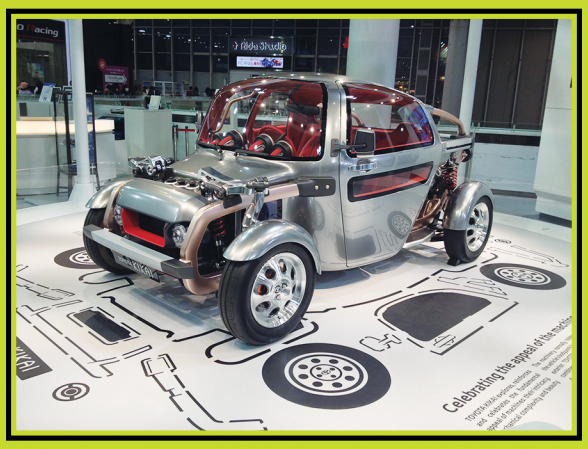
ANIMAL CAFÉS

ONE FOOT IN THE PAST

Tokyo is constantly trying to marry the legacy of the past with the realities of modern day, and that balancing act has resulted in the presence of metaphorical time rifts as fascinating as they are jarring. You see 100-year-old houses flanked by contemporary residential high-rises, or family-operated restaurants that have been running for generations with zero changes to their business methods. These striking oddities fill you with nostalgic warmth – and for a price, you can even take some of that nostalgia home with you! There are tons of shops that are stocked with toys and memorabilia from decades past, arranged so artfully behind glass that it's almost like strolling through a pop culture museum!

. . . AND IN THE FUTURE

Out of the retro age and into tomorrow! Tokyo stands at the forefront of technological progress, from an increasing number of automated kiosks that replace human workers to a mass transit system so efficient that rail operators will actually apologize to passengers if a train is 30 seconds early. Over in Odaiba, you can visit Toyota Mega Web and not only drool over the latest innovations in automotive design, but also engage in VR test drives, as well as actual test drives on an enclosed course. But for those more interested in the true science, pop over to the Toto Showroom in Shinjuku and marvel at their space-age toilets – the future is a throne that deodorizes and plays music to mask your restroom deeds!



Buying souvenirs for friends and coworkers while traveling abroad is common practice the world over, but in Japan, gift-giving takes on a whole new dimension. Omiyage, as souvenirs are called in Japanese, are typically edible goodies exclusive to a particular region, and the resident omiyage for Tokyo is Tokyo Banana. These banana custard-filled sponge cakes may resemble Twinkies, but they use real banana purée in their cream to yield a delicate flavor that's leagues beyond that of Hostess' yellow bars of sadness! Not everyone can appreciate the taste, though – I bought a box of them for my parents for Christmas three years ago, and they couldn't stomach a single one. Oh well! More for me!

TOKYO BANANA

There's something oddly satisfying about eating food shaped like your favorite characters – like those Sonic the Hedgehog and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles ice pops from the '90s! Now imagine an entire menu of such game- or cartoon-inspired treats. Such a concept exists in the form of pop-up installations, wherein brands like Sailor Moon and One Piece partner with existing cafés. One I stumbled upon by chance promoted the 2017 anime film Mary and the Witch's Flower! These establishments typically stick around only for a limited time, but few are popular enough to make encore appearances – the Kirby Café has been such a success that a permanent location opened this winter below Tokyo Skytree!

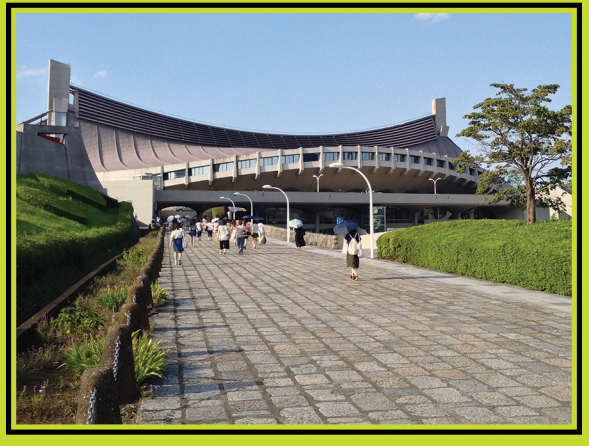
POP-UP CAFÉS

ROBOT RESTAURANT

Back in 2013, the late Anthony Bourdain spent an episode of his travel show Parts Unknown exploring Tokyo's mysterious underside. His journey took him to Shinjuku's chaotic Robot Restaurant for a dinner theater that he wound up declaring the greatest show he'd ever seen. After hearing such enormous praise, who wouldn't want to reserve a seat? If you could condense every stereotype about Japanese culture into a single evening of debauchery, the result would be Robot Restaurant! The main event is a garish cabaret show with giant robots, monstrous floats, blinding lights and infectious music, all performed by a seasoned cast in glorious "Engrish." An obvious tourist trap, but a fantastic one!

YOYOGI NATIONAL GYM

Are you aware that the Olympics are coming to Tokyo in 2020? Yeah, I'm as shocked as you are! This will be the first time since 1964 that Japan's capital hosts the world event. The Yoyogi National Gymnasium in Shibuya is a remnant of those previous Games, during which it was the site of swimming and diving competitions. While Olympic constructions in other host cities have fallen into disrepair after all the fun ended, the National Gymnasium continues to serve as a venue for sporting events and concerts, and will also house handball tournaments for the 2020 Games! When not in use, however, the grounds exude a serene, almost eerie atmosphere – that alone is worth a visit!



Hachikō, a brown Akita, has been immortalized as a symbol of loyalty. Professor Hidesaburō Ueno of Tokyo Imperial University adopted Hachikō in 1924, and every afternoon the faithful pup would greet his master at Shibuya Station. The following year, Ueno collapsed during a lecture and passed away, yet Hachikō continued his daily routine for nearly 10 years until his own death, anxiously awaiting a master who would never again return. Hachikō's tale has since spread outside Japan's borders, inspiring a 2002 Futurama episode, a 2009 Richard Gere movie and countless other works of fiction. And though his story may be bittersweet, his devotion deserves nothing but our utmost admiration.

HACHIKŌ

MEMORY LANE

As I previously implied, Shinjuku conceals Tokyo's rugged core. Though that may sound sinister, I promise it really isn't! All it means is that evidence of the city's tumultuous history can still be found if you know where to look. Step into the narrow alley of Omoide Yokochō ("Memory Lane") and enter a world seemingly trapped in the past. The din of Tokyo traffic fades away as you bounce between laid-back snack bars and diners, a scene reminiscent of post-World War II Japan or perhaps the cyberpunk aesthetic popularized in films such as Blade Runner. It's a different kind of Tokyo oasis, where you can enjoy good food, meet colorful characters and leave your worries of the outside world behind.

SIGHTS UNSEEN . . .

During my three years living in Japan, I visited Tokyo on four occasions, falling even more deeply in love with the city each time. The prospect of discovering some yet unseen side of this vast urban wonderland sets my spirit ablaze – and I sincerely hope that during our brief tour I've been able to ignite the flames of adventure in your hearts as well!

THE NINTENDO FORCE GAME OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2019

Another year has come to an end, and by tradition in the enthusiast gaming press, we must now reflect once again upon the preceding 12 months to decide which new games outdid all the rest! 2019 was especially strong for the Switch – perhaps because it also marked the end of the long tenure of Nintendo's belatedly beloved 3DS. We've debated the merits of each candidate and made our selections. Read on to see if you agree!

BEST GRAPHICS
LUIGI'S MANSION 3

From the opening cutscene featuring a too-short Toad trying to drive a bus and all throughout the hours of adventure that lay ahead, Luigi's third Mansion quest is like a cartoon come to life. Technical advancements like better shadow rendering just help to further sell the incredible, joyful animation. It's a stunner!

BEST MUSIC
CADENCE OF HYRULE

Imagine being an indie team and being handed the keys to the kingdom of Hyrule . . . and then absolutely knocking it out of the park with all that pressure on! Cadence soared on the strength of its sensational soundtrack, expertly remixing decades of classic Zelda tunes, and making them all part of the play experience!

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

BEST CHALLENGE
ASTRAL CHAIN

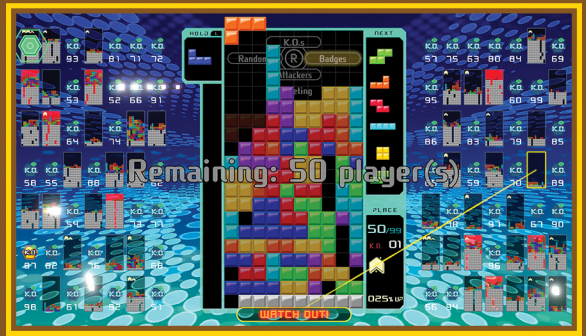
Though the game contains an easy mode, the true experience of Astral Chain is not properly conveyed unless players push themselves to master the rhythms of its unique two-character combat system in the intended tough-as-nails difficulty. Were you one of the few to play the true Astral Chain campaign?

BEST THEME & FUN
UNTITLED GOOSE GAME

"It's a lovely morning in the village – and you are a horrible goose." Could any elevator pitch for a video game be more concisely gripping than that? Nearly everyone has run afoul of an unfriendly fowl at some point in the past, and being able to step into the webbed feet of a honking menace was a great idea.

BEST MULTIPLAYER
TETRIS 99

The Nintendo Switch Online service was in dire need of a truly unmissable reason to subscribe, and it finally came in the form of a surprise-released 99-competitor online multiplayer take on that most classic of puzzlers, Tetris. As it's a free download for NSO members, millions of players have come together to battle it out!



BEST PLAY CONTROL
RING FIT ADVENTURE

The company that innovated gaming's original D-Pad, made touchscreens a viable input interface for play and even figured out how to make controllers built from folded cardboard fun did it again in 2019, dreaming up a flexible ring-shaped controller that reinvented fitness gaming. What will Nintendo think of next?

BIGGEST SURPRISE
COLLECTION OF MANA

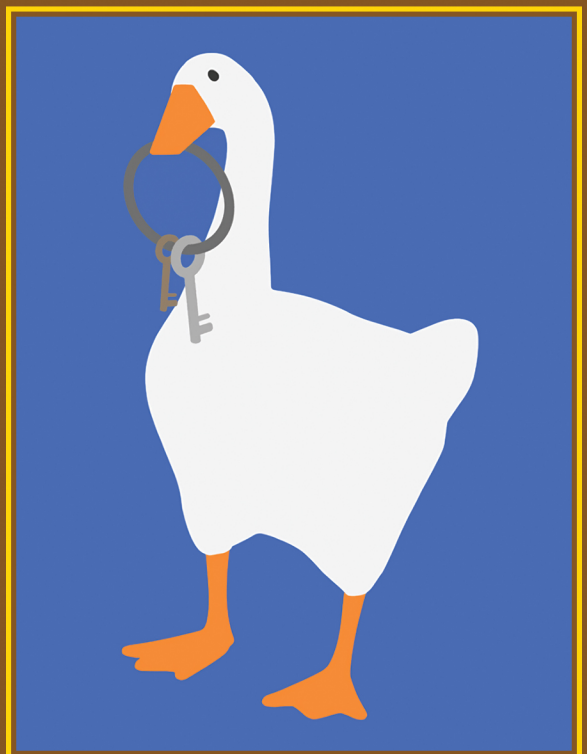
A video game company rereleasing a trio of their vintage titles in a modern compilation is nothing shocking . . . except when one of the three had never been made available in English before! The 16-bit Trials of Mana is finally ours to enjoy – and an all-new 3D remake is coming along soon, too!

BEST REMASTER
LINK'S AWAKENING

Is it a "remaster," technically? Or a remake? Or a . . . you know, the terminology doesn't matter so much. Just consider the "Best Remaster" award to really be "Best Revival of Some Old Game in Some New Way" and let that be that. The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening was brilliantly brought back in 2019!

BEST NEW CHARACTER
THE GOOSE

In a year packed with wildly creative, complicated new character designs across dozens of different games, a plethora of arguably award-worthy new Pokémon creatures and even the masterful living glob of green gelatin that is Gooigi, no other character could eclipse the universal appeal of a common white goose. And, yes, "common" is an apt descriptor to use, as Untitled Goose Game has simply revealed the reality to the world that all geese are sneaky, conniving, practical-joke-playing kleptomaniacs! The developers at House House have done humanity a great service by pulling back the curtain on this avian army of avarice, and while the threat of real-world geese looms ever large when we venture outside our homes, we can be comforted when we're safely inside with our Switch systems and vicariously living the life of one of these beady-eyed, blunt-beaked burglars. (Wait . . . just checking . . . geese can't read, right? No? OK, good. . . . Hey, has anybody seen my keys?)



DLC OF THE YEAR
SMASH FIGHTERS PASS

Though Super Smash Bros. Ultimate was released in 2018, it remained one of the most played and most talked-about Switch titles throughout all of 2019 thanks to the ongoing DLC roster additions of the Fighters Pass. And, luckily, the ride isn't over yet! More characters are coming throughout 2020 too!

ESHOP GAME OF THE YEAR
UNTITLED GOOSE GAME

No digital exclusive prompted more smiles in 2019 than this, the chronicled adventures of one hard-working waterfowl. Who wouldn't want to flap, honk and waddle their way through life, then get to relax with a cheerful picnic assembled with nothing but ill-gotten goods from a nearby garden? No one!

3DS GAME OF THE YEAR
PERSONA Q2

The sun began to set on Nintendo's glasses-free 3D wonder portable throughout 2018, and in 2019 it fully dipped down below the horizon. Of the final few notable releases for the platform in the past 12 months, none was given more love than Persona Q2. And hey, it finally gave us a real Nintendo Joker game!

SWITCH GAME OF THE YEAR
DRAGON QUEST XI S

While other games edged out this epic in individual award categories, no adventure came together as an entire package in 2019 better than the long-awaited Dragon Quest XI S. We tried our best to sing its praises with a DQ-dedicated issue, but if you still missed it, you should rectify that immediately!

THE 2019 NINTENDO FORCE GAME OF THE YEAR

DRAGON QUEST XI S:

ECHOES OF AN ELUSIVE AGE – DEFINITIVE EDITION

In July 2015, less than three weeks after Satoru Iwata passed away, Square Enix held a press conference to announce that Dragon Quest XI was in development for the system that was, at that time, still only known as the "Nintendo NX." No other software had been confirmed for the console that would go on to be named the Switch – DQXI was the first. And the developers took their time. The game didn't arrive for two more years, and only then on PlayStation 4 and Nintendo 3DS in two wildly different versions. Over a year after that, its first localized editions appeared in America on PS4 and PC. But still, the Switch version remained in the works. Finally, this past September the fully completed, highly anticipated Definitive Edition of Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age shipped for the Nintendo Switch. It expertly presents an experience that draws on the best of all the game's previous versions, adds in even more content and, most importantly, fulfills a promise from years ago. Mr. Iwata had met with Square Enix shortly before he left this world, and he'd requested they bring Dragon Quest XI to the NX. And so they have, at last. I think he would have loved it too.

MICKEY MOUSE TAKES ON TOKYO!

MICKEY NO TOKYO DISNEYLAND DAIBOUKEN
SUPER FAMICOM, 1994

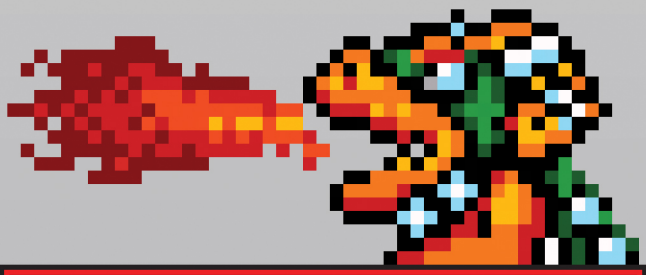
Want to avoid the lines in California or Florida? Why not try your luck at a lesser-known Disney park: Tokyo Disneyland! It's Japan's very own Magic Kingdom – and to encourage an increase in attendance among local residents roughly one decade after it first opened its gates, Disney commissioned the creation of a 16-bit Mickey Mouse adventure in which the iconic mascot hops and bops his way through its many lands and attractions! Though thematically similar to the Adventures in the Magic Kingdom NES game and the multiple SNES Mickey quests we did get in America, Mickey no Tokyo Disneyland Daibouken has remained lost in untranslation for over a quarter-century now thanks to its setting being specifically the Tokyo take on Walt's original park. We missed out on some unique gameplay too, as in this game Mickey fills balloons with both water to attack foes and helium to soar into the air! – **LUCAS**

TOP TEN RETRO TOKYOS

How video games have depicted the city over the decades.

AS NEW RELEASES like Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore and Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020 offer us modern virtual takes on Japan's capital city, it's only natural to want to look back to the past and reflect on how older video games fared when taking on the same task of accurately depicting that sprawling metropolis. And so we set out to turn back the clock and assemble this Top Ten list of representative Retro Tokyos, sure that we'd have far too many to choose from!

. . . Well, not so much! Though taking a broader overview of all of video game history helps (because then you encounter games like the PlayStation-exclusive Tokyo Jungle), limiting such a list as this to only Nintendo history actually makes things a bit tough! Perhaps past generations of Japan's developers were reluctant to render their capital with the limited resources of older hardware, so the surge of Tokyo appearances is a fairly recent development? Whatever the case, here's the best of what's come before! **— LUCAS**



THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

INTO THE EDO ERA

TOKYO WASN'T ALWAYS Tokyo. Centuries ago, the city was known by a different name: Edo. Edo had grown out of a tiny fishing village, then continued to grow, and grow, and *grow* until it became one of the largest centers of civilization on the planet! The name change to Tokyo didn't come around until 1868 — and it's fun to explore virtual visions of what the city was like before that time, still back in the Edo era. Enter The Legend of the Mystical Ninja, starring Goemon! Or, well, excuse me: "Kid Ying." Konami's Goemon series had first appeared in the '80s in Japan, but when this 16-bit sequel was selected to be the first installment localized for a Western market, aspects of its Japanese-ness were altered — including the protagonist's name. Further sequels in the series set that wrong right, though, and all of them offer an offbeat, cartoonish take on Japanese culture circa three centuries ago. You'll encounter ghost women, ninja cats, robots (?) and giant octopi — and one boss battle even takes place at a goofy version of the Kanto Matsuri lantern festival! **— LUCAS**

SIMCITY

KOOPA KONTAINMENT

IN THE SNES version of SimCity, there was a whole section of gameplay where players were asked to deal with a natural — or totally unnatural — disaster. San Francisco had an earthquake, Boston had a nuclear meltdown and Rio de Janeiro had coastal flooding, just to name a few. The idea would be to witness the disaster and then repair the city within a designated time cycle. So, what would a good scenario for Tokyo be? Monster attack, of course! Also, being on a Nintendo system, they didn't bother to get the rights to add Godzilla, but supplanted Bowser as their go-to villain. Bowser waltzes through the town on a random course tearing up roads, collapsing buildings and setting fires. In just five years you must contain the destruction, repair when necessary and not wreck your budget. The main issue is their lack of initial fire protection, so if Bowser ends up hitting a fire department in his haphazard spree, it can spell Game Over. Can you save the SimCitizens of virtual Tokyo with an operating budget of only $20,000? Good luck, mayor! **— BRETT**

SHAQ FU

O'NEAL-SAMA

STOP ME IF you've heard this one before: A 7'1" NBA all-star finds himself in Tokyo to participate in a celebrity basketball game. Rather than having someone drive him to the venue for the event, or a hotel, or even some local tourist destination, he instead decides to explore a run-down neighborhood on foot and alone. Turning a corner past a building proudly promoting Pepsi soft drinks, he spies a handwritten sign advertising Kung Fu lessons and decides to duck inside a shady dojo. There, he encounters the most stereotypical old martial arts master ever conceived and is told that he is the "chosen one" who must save a young boy who has been kidnapped by a mummy in an alternate dimension known as the Second World. (. . . I told you to stop me. Why haven't you stopped me yet?) Anywho, all of that is the honest-to-goodness storyline setup of Shaquille O'Neal's Shaq Fu, a Super NES relic that really has no business being recognized or remembered in any positive light these days, especially for its tepid depiction of Tokyo — but I really just wanted to share how ludicrous it was. **— LUCAS**

SIN & PUNISHMENT

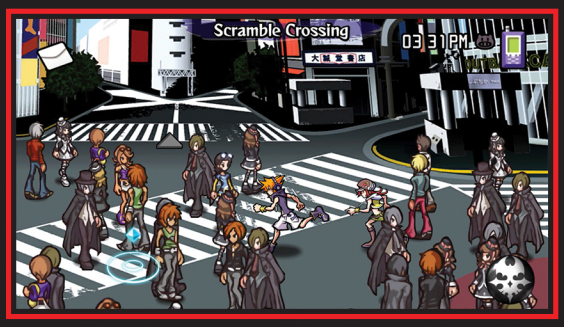
RANSACKED BY RUFFIANS

"NEO TOKYO IS about to EXPLODE!" That warning was a quintessential part of anime culture in the '90s, an era when pre-apocalyptic visions of Japan's capital city were everywhere in Eastern sci-fi, and Sin & Punishment was no exception. Struggling against global famine, the game's Japanese government creates an artificial life form that can be used for food, but it's not long before these creatures (nicknamed Ruffians) evolve and attack their creators. Soon Tokyo is overrun with these strange beasts, allowing the fascist government to take military control over the entire city, all under the guise of "protecting the people." As Saki Amamiya, you blast through dirty streets and looming skyscrapers, rumbling with both mutants and armed forces, until . . . a sudden tidal wave of blood causes the poor boy to transform into a giant Kaiju monstrosity? Anyone familiar with Tetsuo Shima, the anti-hero of Akira, will feel right at home in this conflict-packed version of Tokyo, a place with Angst vs. Authority and Trust vs. Betrayal-themed struggles lying around every corner. **— JONATHAN**

GODZILLA: DESTROY ALL MONSTERS MELEE

CALLING ON THE KAIJU

IN THE WORLD of the movies, the city of Tokyo has served a singular recurring role for decades: It's the favored battleground of Godzilla! The enormous kaiju beast has risen up from the depths of the ocean and laid waste to Japan's capital through more sequels and reboots than anyone can reasonably count at this point, as Godzilla films began all the way back in the '50s. (Since we just turned the corner into an all-new '20s, that means "GOJIRA" has been menacing the masses since seven decades ago!) His reign of terror has been a bit shorter in the video game medium, but depictions of him interactively trashing Tokyo still stretch back to the '80s. Slightly more modern (at just 18 years old) is Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee from the GameCube. It offered Nintendo gamers the chance to command the firebreathing, tail-swiping, pedestrian-stomping might of Godzilla in a destructible 3D take on Tokyo for the first time ever. And, interestingly, it was one of the earliest games directed and designed by Matt Bozon, as well as one of the first with a soundtrack by Jake Kaufman! **— LUCAS**



THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

A SINISTER SHIBUYA

SQUARE ENIX'S MODERN-DAY RPG The World Ends With You takes place in a remixed version of Shibuya, where Neku Sakuraba finds himself the newest Player of the Reaper's Game after a series of mysterious events. He and his allies Shiki, Joshua, Beat and Rhyme have one goal as they fight monstrous Noise and the machinations of the Game Masters: to survive and win. TWEWY's Shibuya is an almost faithful recreation of the Shibuya of 2007 (the year the game was initially released for the Nintendo DS in Japan), complete with important landmarks like the statue of Hachiko and the graffiti wall in Udegawa where Neku encounters the artwork of CAT that changes his life. There are even a few real-life retail locations that appear for all your shopping needs: Towa Records (Tower Records), Shibuya 104 (Shibuya 109), Shibu-Q Heads (Tokyu Hands) and Outback Coffee (Starbucks), to name a few. And like the real world, Shibuya's style is king: Your combat influences the popularity of one of the game's 13 fashion brands, which in turn can boost your attack power! **— REBECCA**

TOKYO CRASH MOBS

BEATING THE CROWDS

TOKYO IS ONE of the most densely populated places on the planet. That's not OK with Grace and Savannah, two stylish young women who are ready to destroy all comers with the power of color matching! For Grace, this means picking up people and throwing them into a line of strangers in front of her, making anyone disappear if they touch two or more pedestrians wearing matching jackets. For Savannah, things are a little more desperate. A group of enthusiastic, brightly dressed citizens march toward a red button. Should they reach it, Savannah will fall into a bottomless pit! So while Grace simply wants to get to the head of the pack, Savannah must solve puzzles using human bodies just to stay alive. Then, on Saturdays, the two ladies team up for boss battles against a group of ninjas. If you think this sounds like some sort of bizarre hallucination, then you're right on target. Tokyo Crash Mobs' official slogan is "Delusion Now," a fitting phrase for this delightfully strange, one-of-a-kind FMV puzzle game. Grace and Savannah for Smash! **— JONATHAN**

ATTACK OF THE FRIDAY MONSTERS! A TOKYO TALE

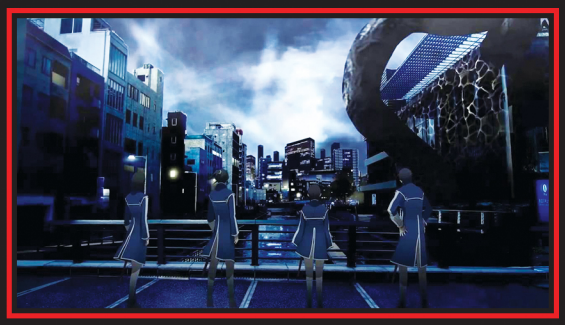
THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES

A LOT OF attention is paid to Tokyo's many bustling shopping districts and rich urban culture, but the city's many suburbs and connected country villages are equally deserving of praise. In Level-5's Attack of the Friday Monsters! A Tokyo Tale, the player witnesses one of these unassuming small towns through the eyes of Sohta, a young boy just barely old enough to see over the edge of childhood and into the larger adult world beyond. He lives his life in the shadow of both Tokyo, and of the drama brewing between the grown-ups around him. A free spirit, he wanders the community unsupervised, playing competitive card games with friends, helping out strangers and taking in the serene sights and sounds of a side of Japan still untouched by modern society. There are no smartphones and no computers, or even many paved roads. Instead, there might be a battle between a 100-foot-tall super-hero and a giant alien menace. Or is that just Sohta's imagination running wild again? Better yet, why don't we have both?
— JONATHAN

RIVER CITY: TOKYO RUMBLE

LOSING THE LOCALIZATION

FOR OVER A quarter-century — going all the way back to the release of River City Ransom on the NES in 1990, and extending until 2016 — every installment in Japan's popular Kunio-kun series that made its way across the Pacific did so by being heavily localized. This brand's heroes were "Alex" and "Ryan" for decades — or else they were given other entirely different but still Americanized names, such as in 1992's Crash 'n' the Boys: Street Challenge. It wasn't until Natsume's release of River City: Tokyo Rumble that a different decision was finally made, and the characters' original names were retained: "Alex" and "Ryan" were no more, in favor of Kunio and Riki! What's more, the "River City" veneer was wiped away, revealing for anyone who didn't know that this long-running series has really been taking place in Tokyo all along. (In this particular adventure, Kunio must stop a gang of delinquents calling themselves the Tokyo Lion Alliance from conquering the city.) The choice to finally let this series be itself paved the way for the games that followed, like the recent River City Girls! **— LUCAS**



THE SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI & PERSONA SERIES

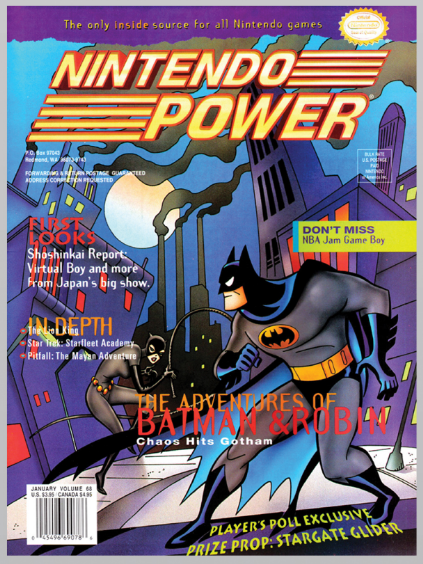
TOKYO'S PARALLEL WORLDS

FINALLY, ONE MEGA entry here to wrap things up, as it's impossible to single out any one entry in either the Shin Megami Tensei or Persona franchises, since the two sister series both tell several tales almost entirely in Tokyo. All together, 20 different main installments and spin-offs in both of these series feature some version of the city. In Megami Tensei II, Tokyo gets destroyed by a nuclear missile — which also has the unfortunate side effect of opening up a hole that unleashes a swarm of demons into the Earth. Another nuke wipes the city out again in Shin Megami Tensei, and in Shin Megami Tensei II the whole metropolitan area has been transformed into the "Underworld," a place where demons live (of course). In Shin Megami Tensei III, Tokyo is destroyed (of course!), but at least it's destroyed differently! It gets transformed into an enormous orb called the Vortex World, which is essentially a Dyson sphere. (There's a Star Trek: The Next Generation episode all about that. Look it up.) For an alternate media analogue for Shin Megami Tensei IV, consider The Simpsons Movie — the dome that settles over the entirety of Springfield in that film is similar to the ceiling that settles over Tokyo in SMTIV. (Though there are far fewer demons in Bart's neck of the woods.) Slightly more uplifting is the vision of Tokyo seen in Persona 5, as the city is perfectly undestroyed there — in fact, on the surface, everything seems perfectly normal as citizens go about the business of their daily lives! Joker and the rest of the Phantom Thieves discover the sinister parallel worlds that twist some segments of the city in the hearts of evil adults, though. And they put a stop to that! **— LUCAS**

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

ISSUE #68: JANUARY 1995



ISSUE #69: FEBRUARY 1995

THE JANUARY 1995 issue of Nintendo Power began on a Dark and stormy Knight, as The Adventures of Batman & Robin took the cover (behind a glow-in-the-dark '95/Play It Loud cover for Super Power Club subscribers), complete with a new 3D NP logo designed by Rare. This kicked off a new visual style for the magazine that can be felt throughout, from the Contents to the "Next Issue" page.

Other full coverage features included The Lion King, Robotrek, Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure, Street Racer, Star Trek: Starfleet Academy and Animaniacs – and new "Take 2" two-page reviews that looked at X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse, Lemmings 2: The Tribes, Dragon View, Aero the Acrobat 2, Brutal: Paws of Fury, Kid Klown in Crazy Chase and Biker Mice from Mars (all for the Super NES). For fans of Portable Power, there was Daffy Duck: The Marvin Missions, NBA Jam and Madden '95.

As promised, Virtual Boy got a two-page update as part of the greater Shoshinkai coverage, which talked about upcoming titles for the Super Famicom and Game Boy, with the first peek at the Play It Loud line of colored cases.

Super Power Club members received access to a 16-page "Members Only Special," which featured the Top 10 Super NES games of 1994 (led by Donkey Kong Country) and Top 5 Game Boy games (topped by Donkey Kong, minus the Country). A 1995 preview showed off an early look at Donkey Kong Land (including a fedora-sporting ape who didn't make the final cut), Comanche (a Super FX title that was ultimately cancelled), Kirby 2, NBA Jam: Tournament Edition, Secret of Evermore, Kyle Petty's No Fear Racing and Dirt Trax FX. Capping things off was a look back at PowerFest '94 and a guide to how to truly "play it loud" with your SNES.

The Top 20 became the Power Charts, featuring the Top 20 Super NES games, the Top 10 Game Boy titles a rotating Top 10 list (this month was "quests"), as well as a Top 10 "Most Wanted," plus a Hall of Fame for titles with long reigns, featuring The Legend of Zelda, Super Mario Bros. 3 and Tetris. The new Power Player Arena pitted Power Players against the best the pros and other players had to offer, and this month's Player's Poll winner would walk away with a StarGate glider. Closing things out, even Pak Watch had a new look, headed by Tecmo Super Bowl.

January poster boy Mega Man X2 took the cover for February, leading things off with 10 pages of coverage. Other Super NES features included Kirby's Dream Course, more of The Lion King, then Wolverine: Adamantium Rage, SeaQuest DSV and a Sports Scene featuring both WWF Raw and WCW Brawler, among other sports titles, while the only Game Boy title was Desert Strike. Take 2 Reviews covered Pieces, Kirby's Avalanche, C2: Judgment Clay and Tiny Toons: Wacky Sports.

Special features included a strategy guide for Super Punch-Out!!; "Powered Up: The Super FX Team," which looked at Star Fox 2, FX Fighter, Comanche and Dirt Trax FX (all unreleased in the SNES era except for Dirt Trax, though Star Fox 2 finally saw release on the SNES Classic in 2017); and a six-page look at Donkey Kong Land, including more shots of that mysterious hat-wearing gorilla.

The Player's Poll winner would receive a chance to visit Universal Studios in Florida and be an extra on SeaQuest DSV, Donkey Kong took the top spot in the Super NES, Game Boy and Most Wanted Power Charts, with Sports being the theme of the month and the Hall of Fame honoring Mega Man, Super Mario World and Street Fighter II. Pak Watch featured more Star Fox 2 and a "Behind the Scene" look at "The Mother of All RPGs," EarthBound, and then we closed things out with a variety of Nintendo giveaways and offers from Kellogg's. — **DAVID**

SHOSHINKAI: THE SHOWCASE FOR JAPANESE VIDEO GAMES

Shoshinkai also showcased some of 1995's best games for the Super Famicom (the Japanese version of the Super NES) and Game Boy. Although all the games shown are scheduled for Japanese release this year, some of them may not be released in the U.S. soon or at all. For now, these games show some interesting trends in one of the world's largest video game markets.

Topping almost everyone's list of exciting games was Chrono Trigger, a new RPG from the makers of Final Fantasy III. One big difference in this game is the number of special graphic effects and the stunning realism of the graphics overall. Gone are the simple animations of FF3, replaced by far more cinematic views. Midsummer should be the time for this game's release. Further earth-quaking news from Square is that, following Chrono Trigger, players will have Secret of Mana II to look forward to in the middle of the year while strategy players will stake their reputations on Square's futuristic battlefield in Front Mission. Front Mission combines elements of RPG gaming with a turn-based strategy war game in which you move huge robo-mech units against enemy units and bases. Albert Odyssey 2 from Sunsoft was just one of many good-looking RPGs. Others included Tale Phantasia from Namco, the long awaited DragonQuest VI (which looked awesome) and Chun Soft's Taloon's Mystery Dungeon 2, which stands a good chance of coming to the U.S. Aretha II from Yanoman continues a popular Japanese series and Falcom's new Y's adventure looked a lot like a Zelda game—another potential hit if it crosses the Pacific. There was even an RPG fighter from Takara.

Of course, Donkey Kong Country was the hands-down favorite of the show, but Nintendo also surprised many people with a very early version of a polygon fighter that is being developed in association with Argonaut (the British developer that also helped create Star Fox.) The game features full 3-D rotation features and futuristic opponents. Power will bring you more on the project as it develops. Almost finished was the Super Game Boy offering of Kirby 2, which was without a doubt the best Game Boy title shown. The most unique Game Boy offering, however, was the new designer series of Game Boys in special colors. In Japan, you will be able to buy yellow, green, red, black and white Game Boys. There is even a clear Game Boy unit that shows off the hardware inside.

Other notable games included NBA Jam Tournament Edition, Super Bomberman 3, and Enix's long-awaited Dragon Quest VI, which looks even better than Final Fantasy III and contains a much improved first person battle view. Mystery Dungeon 2 from Chun Soft-the DragonQuest creators—features action and adventure in a game with RPG depth. Elsewhere around the show, third party licensees did their best to cash in on the Japanese RPG craze with every conceivable variation on the Final Fantasy style. If you can read Japanese and you have a Super Famicom, you could spend years playing all these games.

The action category had few new entries. Fighting games were conspicuous in their absence, but there were a few fun platform games including Nightmare Busters, Super Pop and Go Go Ackman from Banpresto. For simulation fans, the biggest news was a demonstration of Sim City 2000 from Imagineer on the Super NES. Aamik had a strategy/sim fighter plane game that turned a few heads. But the biggest sim category was horse racing. In the Tokyo stores we counted five existing horse racing games with as many new titles appearing at Shoshinkai. Can Mr. Ed be far behind?

Pinball was also a hot category in Japan, as well as Pachinko, which remains a national craze. Super Pinball 2 was shown in an arcade version that looked just like a mechanical pinball machine while Battle Pinball, a Banpresto offering, featured multi-level pinball action similar to Kirby's Pinball.

One favorite was Super Bomberman III from Hudson—the best Bomberman title to date. Not only can you choose from a variety of Bombermen characters, you can also ride around on Bomberman kangaroos that give you an extra hit-life.

What we learned from the show is that Japanese developers are still hard at work cranking out excellent Super NES and Game Boy titles, many of which should show up on our shores within the next 12 months. We'll let you know when they reach the dock.

CHARACTER PROF...

CHROM

Though he's not exactly old enough to be considered "Retro" yet, this fan favorite has achieved superstar status already . . . in Japan!

FIRST APPEARANCE
FIRE EMBLEM AWAKENING (2013)

CAREER HIGHS

CAREER LOWS

'13 — Chrom burst onto the scene as the hero of the game that saved the whole Fire Emblem franchise!

'14 — But, embarrassingly, he was passed over for the Smash cast in favor of secondary stars Lucina and Robin.

'15 — The following year he headlined Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE on Wii U, but its sales were unimpressive.

'18 — Thanks to tons of requests from fans in Japan, Chrom made the cut for Super Smash Bros. Ultimate!

'18 — Unfortunately, not as a wholly unique combatant. He's considered an Echo Fighter of Roy.

'19 — As of this past November 15, Chrom is one of only a few Nintendo icons to have earned more than one amiibo!

'20 — As 2020 dawns, Nintendo looks to Chrom once more and hopes his power to find second chance success comes through again. He headlined Awakening, which pulled the FE brand from the brink of cancellation.

He missed joining Smash with his first chance, but made it the second time. So maybe his star power will be enough to make TMS#FE succeed with its second chance too?

HIGHLIGHTS

FIRE EMBLEM AWAKENING
3DS, 2013

Chrom was first introduced to audiences in this breakout hit that also served as a distant sequel to the earliest Fire Emblem games. Fittingly, Chrom himself is a descendant of FE's first protagonist, the legendary Hero-King Marth, and that lineage directly impacts the story when "Marth" appears through a time portal!

TOKYO MIRAGE SESSIONS #FE
Wii U, 2016

With the entire history of Fire Emblem heroes to draw upon in creating this crossover game that linked the brand up with Shin Megami Tensei, the developers prioritized Chrom above all others, redesigning him as a spooky ghost-like Mirage!

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE
SWITCH, 2018

Chrom may officially be an Echo Fighter in the newest Smash sequel, but he's at least the least echo-ish of them all – he draws most of his moves from Roy, but then mixes things up by borrowing his Up Special from Ike instead.

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

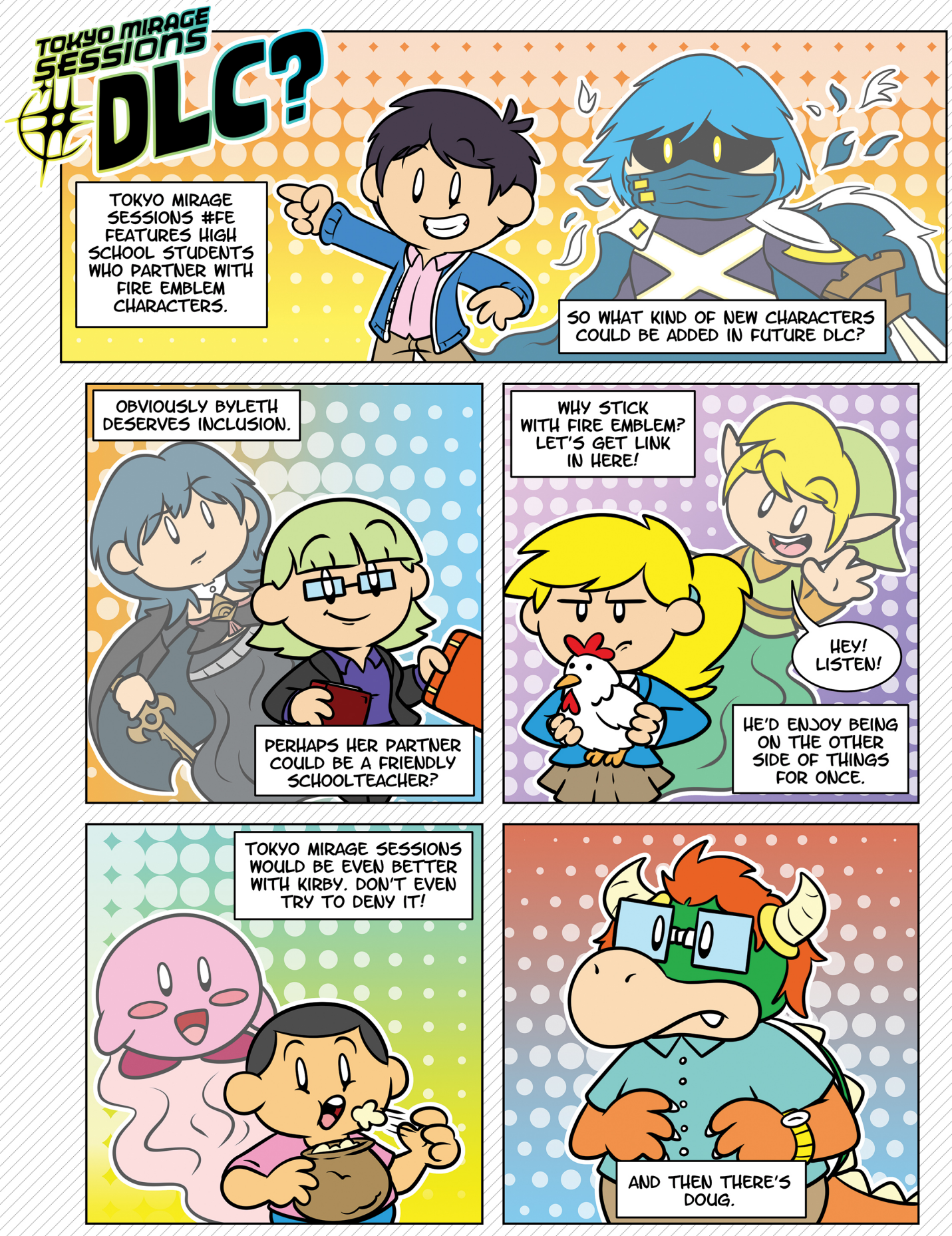
"Our bond is stronger than steel."

- SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE

LAUNCHING OUR OWN LEGACY!

NF'S COVER STAR

We can't very well present a Character Profile of Chrom without thanking him for his help in kicking off our very own magazine! Fire Emblem Awakening was the first hot game on Nintendo's release calendar following the cancellation of Nintendo Power, so we chose it to command the front cover of our debut issue – exactly seven years ago now! Thanks Chrom – and thanks to the rest of the Awakening cast as well!



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
July 11, 1988, in South Central Los Angeles, California

FAVORITE FOOD
Sweet & Sour Chicken and Boba Tea

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS
I can play the drums, I practice karate (achieved a purple belt) and boxing since I was a kid, I like baseball (L.A. Dodgers, Hanshin Tigers and Seibu Lions are my favorite teams), black cats are my spiritual/favorite animal.

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Localization Producer and Community Manager

TION "BOSSCAT" BRUTON

Working to bring Japan's games to Western audiences . . . and vice versa!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: What were some of the games you loved growing up?
TION: I loved playing JRPGs like Dragon Quest III, Fire Emblem, Mother 2/EarthBound, Pokémon Gold/Silver, Final Fantasy VII and Shenmue when I was growing up. Some of my current favorites are the Ryū ga Gotoku/Yakuza series, and three of our own titles: the Mercenaries Saga/Wings series, The Friends of Ringo Ishikawa and Shadows of Adam.

What was your first job in the industry and how did you get it?
When I first started working at Circle/Flyhigh Works almost eight years ago. I remember one day I randomly reached out to Circle's CEO Chris Chau (who is now my greatest mentor) about publishing on PlayStation and other platforms since Circle only published on Nintendo. He asked if I knew any indie devs that would be interested in working with Circle. I was able to connect him to a lot of indie devs that I had met and networked with over the years. After that I was offered a position at Circle. Soon after I met Kou-san, CEO of Flyhigh Works, our Japanese localization team and partner. I began helping both teams with various localization projects and became an employee for both companies. Now I am currently focusing on building our fan community.

How do you explain to people what it means to localize a game? What are some of the common misunderstandings that you have to clear up?
I often teach Circle/Flyhigh Works fans concepts of localization in our Discord. I often explain that localization is the process of changing a product (in this case indie games) from one country to make it adaptable/relatable and appealing to fans in another country.

The biggest misconception is assuming translation is the only crucial part of localization. There are many layers and processes to localization – like QA testing, marketing, PR, etc. – and not all products will have to go through the same process because everything is case-by-case. Some content in one country may not be acceptable in another, so sometimes content has to be modified.

Circle has gotten contracts for some big-name Western indies like SteamWorld Heist, World of Goo and Golf Story, to name a few. What does it take for a Western game to succeed in the Japanese market?
It is important that the indie game stand out and be appealing to Japanese fans art-wise. So an indie game that has Asian aesthetics like anime/manga, or a unique hand-drawn animation style, would be start. Also games that have challenging but fun gameplay but are not super text-heavy. A lot of Western games do not get released in Japan or Asia in general because if there is a lot of text it becomes difficult to localize due to limited resources.

Kamiko on Switch was a huge success in the West, despite coming from a relatively small developer. What does it take for a Japanese indie to grab people's attention in the increasingly crowded Western marketplace?
Kamiko was a success because it stood out from other indie games in terms of art (Skipmore-san, the developer, is an amazing pixel artist), a fun story with unique characters and great gameplay. It was inspired by concepts from Japanese Shinto religion, which is uncommon/unique in the West. So I think Japanese indie developers in general have unique/interesting concepts for games and usually have great/unique art which captures Western fans' attention. Also, working with a great, local publishing partner in Asia like us that can help spread the word/make sure there is a core fan base/demand for unique titles helps. Also speaking of Kamiko, a dream of mine would be if Yamato would be included as a fighter in Smash Bros. Ultimate – but there's already a huge lineup!

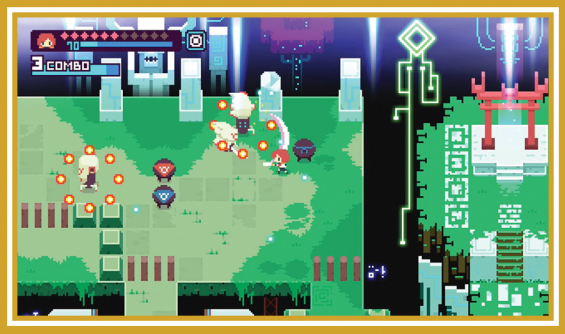
On top of digitally publishing games in multiple countries from developers all over the world, Circle has also started dipping its toes into the pool of physical publishing with B-Side Games. Why do you think it is that AAA games like Overwatch are going purely digital on Switch, while indie games like yours get physical?
I cannot speak on other products and other publishers' ways of doing things like releasing physical without a cartridge! What I will say is that B-Side Games is another passionate project of ours, just like our Flyhigh Cafe. We wanted to release physicals of indie games in Japan after a lot of our fans (both in the East and the West) asked us if we would release physicals. We listen to our fans and really appreciate their feedback. So it depends if there is a demand for physicals, no matter if it is AAA or indie.

I was shocked and excited to see that Incredible Mandy, a beautiful 3D action/adventure game, was also

TION'S GAMEOGRAPHY

Tion has worked with a wide variety of games over the course of her career. One of the first was Witch & Hero, a low-priced, easy-to-play 3DS title that helped put Circle on the map, before becoming a series in its own right. Kamiko did even more to expand the company's reach, being a popular launch-window Switch exclusive. Then Deemo went on to gain enough prestige to be adapted into an animated film for 2020 by the studio that made the Attack on Titan series, while The Friends of Ringo Ishikawa gained critical acclaim for its subtlety and heart. They're all available now in the Nintendo Switch eShop.

WITCH & HERO



KAMIKO

DEEMO

THE FRIENDS OF RINGO ISHIKAWA

published by Circle. After having had such success with 2D pixel art games, what inspired you to head out in this new direction?
Thank you so much for checking out Incredible Mandy by our partners Dotoyou Games! We really hope you and our other amazing fans who picked it up enjoyed it! We love all kinds of indies, so it does not matter to us if it's 2D or 3D. However, I think our main inspiration for wanting to be a part of this project is how incredibly unique Incredible Mandy's 3D art is. It is different for the norm in terms of style, and its unique gameplay also introduces some incredible puzzles and challenges.

Circle has grown so much over the years. What do you attribute that growth to, and where do you see the company going next?
I am now in charge of building our community on Discord, in particular, as well as working to be a liaison between our fans, our partners/devs and Circle/Flyhigh Works/B-Side Games. Any feedback that is given to me I share with our team so we can discuss and implement any changes or suggestions we see fit. It's basically a family affair.

As far as our next goals, I think we will continue to work on building our presence in the West. We have a lot of amazing fans everywhere, but we want to gain more attention and work with more amazing devs everywhere.

You've worked in China, Japan and the USA. What are some of the largest cultural differences you've had to bridge over the years, and what is it about taking on these types of challenges that excites you?
I think the biggest/most crucial part of overcoming cultural differences is communication. We have team members from China, Taiwan, Japan, UK and the US, so we have learned how to communicate with each other – and, most importantly, have fun when interacting and supporting each other.

I am excited to help bridge East and West together. I personally would love to work with more devs, whether they are from LA/inspired by LA culture like me, or in other amazing cities/countries and are making games that have diverse characters and cultural inspirations from their own cities/countries.

There's been a lot of debate among fans when it comes to the idea that some localization decisions are effectively censorship. On one hand, you have folks who think that some games have excessive fanservice thrown in because that's what sells in the East, and that toning it down for the West just makes sense for that market – and on the other, you have people who seem to feel that making these kinds of changes diminishes the artistic integrity of the games in question. As a multicultural, multilingual professional and fan, what do you make of this argument, and is there any way to actually "win" it?
I understand the argument on both sides, but I honestly think that games do not need fanservice or adult-rated content to be successful in either market. The main thing that can diminish the probability of the game being released in West is if certain changes of in-game content are not modified to suit both government mandated laws and manufacture policies/standards. This also applies to games being released in China. Games with sexual, political or offensive content are not allowed. So I think the best way is to compromise and release a high quality product/game that everyone can enjoy without there being a lot of unnecessary backlash/negative feedback or heated debate about it.

What advice would you give someone who wants to get into localization?
I would advise anyone who wants to get into localization to study English/a foreign language or two and practice translation (games/books/manga/etc.) or QA testing, and network with devs or anyone related to the fields someone would want to work in. Always try to volunteer or set a professional quote to help on translation projects. It will also look great on your resume for future opportunities.

If you could make a game using any Nintendo characters, what would you make and why?
I am torn between making a Fire Emblem game or EarthBound game with more POC/LGBTQ characters included. I loved the fact that this was incorporated into Fire Emblem: Three Houses. I am a fan of urban and fantasy RPGs and I think it is great/more interesting to have characters with different perspectives/cultural backgrounds included in all games.

Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
Shapeshifting, because I want to change from human to catgirl.

REVERSE LOCALIZATION?

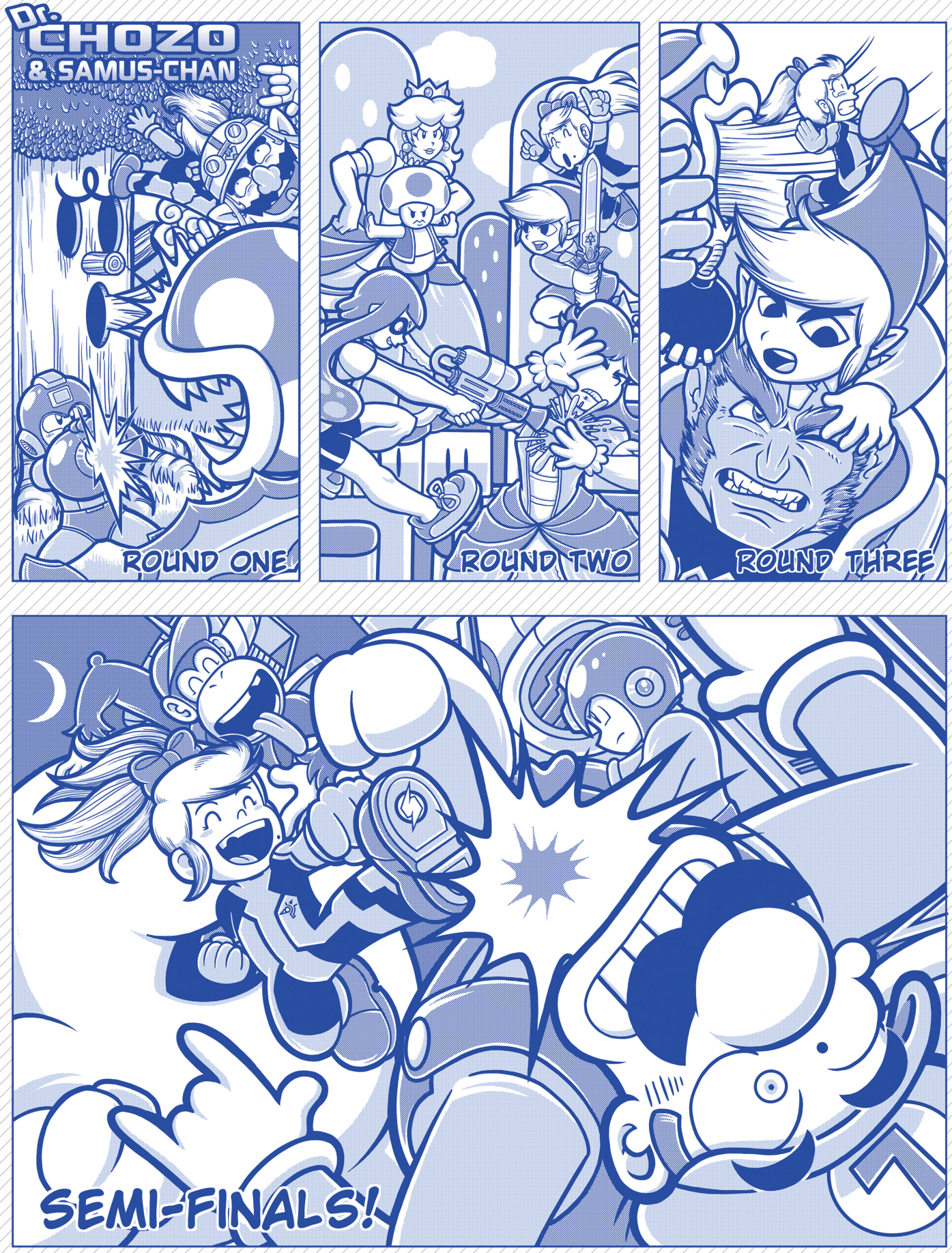
Any time we hear the term "localization," we naturally think of games that were originally made in Japan, with Japanese text, getting translated and tweaked to be able to be sold to English-speaking audiences. But Tion is one of a select few who help the process happen in the opposite direction too: localizing games that were originally made in English and bringing them to video game fans in Japan! Here are just a few of the notable titles she's worked on in that way.

WORLD OF GOO

GOLF STORY

ALWA'S AWAKENING

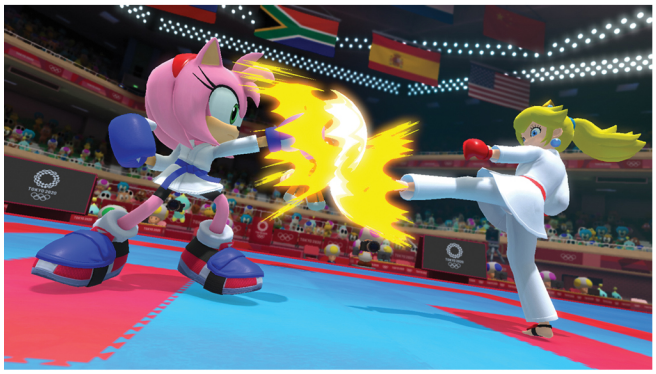
STEAMWORLD QUEST: THE HAND OF GILGAMECH



BY THOR THORVALDSON

The worlds of Mario and Sonic have collided once again, as the spirit of Olympic competition bursts into flame once more – in the city of Tokyo! And while the actual Summer Games won't begin until July, our review of Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020 is available right now!

TOKYO 2020



Go for the Gold in Tokyo!

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLMYPIC GAMES: TOKYO 2020

MARIO AND SONIC (and their many friends and foes/frenemies) have been competing together and against one another at the Olympic Games for over a decade. As both mascots come from Japanese companies, something just feels right about the next crossover competition taking place in Tokyo as we head toward the 2020 Games.

In the time since the series began on the Wii and Nintendo DS, there has been something of a divide between the console and portable versions of each iteration. While the console versions would boast better graphics and sport modes such as a board game-like setup, those who partook in the handheld side of things would be treated to a story mode in which the cast of characters would interact with humorous results.

As the divide between the two no longer exists with the Switch, we finally get to see what a Mario & Sonic story mode is like on a home console, and it's the star of the show. Despite the bump up to high definition, it doesn't differ too much from what we saw on the handhelds. Cutscenes, such as they are, progress the story through more of a visual novel style than anything fully animated (with the exception of some nice fully animated scenes by Marza at the beginning and end). The characters do perform gestures and have some nice expressions throughout, at least.

What's more, presumably thanks to Mario and Luigi's vows to never speak in more than sound bytes in-game, there isn't really any spoken dialogue apart from those bytes — everything is told in text. Which is kind of too bad, as I'm sure Mike Pollock's delivery of Eggman's lines would have really elevated the material.

What's there ranges from decent to pretty good, as we follow two groups throughout the story: Mario, Sonic, Toad, Bowser and Eggman are trapped inside the latter's Tokyo '64 game console, competing in retro-styled events in order to gather enough gold medals to free themselves. Meanwhile, Tails and Luigi star in the modern portion of things, working on their end to free everyone from the game, with hijinks ensuing.

Sadly, this does mean that we don't get some of the wider range of subplots seen in previous installments. Will anything ever top Waluigi's invention of the Waluigiscopes in order to best his green-clad rival? Not this year.

As I said before, the Story Mode is the star of the show, and the tale it weaves is only a small part of it. As the heroes and villains seek to achieve their respective goals, you're taken on a nice tour of nearly every event the game has to offer. You'll square off against friends and foes alike for various purposes, and winning each event will even see a number of them join you on your journey.

This is perhaps the best way to learn each event in the game, as they're preceded by the details you need to know in order to play and succeed — a formality skipped (but which can be called upon as you wish) in the game's other modes. You also needn't worry about any event preventing you from continuing on, as you'll have three attempts before an option unlocks that allows you to skip the event in question. You can also elect to forgo the option if you choose, or even replay the event in case you think you can do even better. (I've done both several times throughout.)

Travelling around to the different destinations is presented nicely as well, as you tour a map of 2019 and 1964 Tokyo (the last time the games were held in Japan), respectively. While landmarks aren't to scale, Sega says that the geography is otherwise accurate to real life, so Story Mode also doubles as a sort of virtual sight-

seeing guide for those who have ever wanted to visit the city. Plus, there are trophies you can pick up all over both versions that give you neat trivia about the venues, city and characters.

Bonus minigames also crop up throughout the course of the adventure. At one point, Eggman attempts an escape on board a bullet train, so naturally the Blue Blur kicks into high gear to intercept him as only he can. Another scene has Mario pilot the Tornado through a shooter stage chasing Eggman and his Badniks above Tokyo, while Sonic wing-walks. And that's not even getting into what Tails and Luigi get up to!

The events themselves are, for the most part, not too complicated to learn and figure out. I was worried at first about one of the more complex ones, Rugby Sevens, but did just fine. Conversely, there were a few sticking points; I had no idea what I was doing wrong in 1964 volleyball, for instance, and the pivot-less D-Pad on my Switch Pro Controller really wrecked me too many times over in the final stretch of the marathon.

Some fans might be disappointed by what might be considered the more fanservice-y aspects of this latest title. For instance, you won't find any new characters on the roster (where's Pauline?), and even some of the ones seen in Rio 2016 are now gone (come back, Sticks!). Meanwhile, some of those who did make it in are only available for a single event. (Do you like Rosalina? Then I hope you love surfing!) On the upside, Dream Events make their return; on the downside, there are only three this year.

While I couldn't put Story Mode down until I finished it (and there's more there once you do), there are also local and online options. Online is tricky and I didn't get to play as much as I'd like; while what I got to play performed well, it was difficult to get enough people to play some events and modes; having bots fill out the remaining spots would have been nice.

Though there is room to improve, Mario & Sonic nevertheless do what they do best, and that's deliver a fun experience from beginning to end.
— DAVID

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SEGA
RATING: E10+

SECOND OPINION
GOOD FAMILY FUN

I STARTED BY playing the story mode. I figured I'd unlock things quicker and get a feel for each event. I absolutely love that they put some thought and effort into connecting the 1964 Tokyo Games and the upcoming 2020 event. Even better, they added retro events using 8-bit and 16-bit graphics for Mario and Sonic respectively by having them get sucked into a retro console.

While I appreciate the creativity involved with that, for me, the actuality of the story mode left a little to be desired. Players are met with an absolute slog of text and lazily animated characters discussing what they should do next. This mess of largely unskippable dialogue is occasionally broken up by Olympic events that blissfully unaware characters engage in, despite the rather serious peril.

The challenge here is very mild. You're thrown into an event, shown the controls and basic premise of it, and then you compete. There was no practice mode that you occasionally see in other modes, but it's largely unnecessary as I typically beat my opponent easily without having to retry.

Charging the Excitement Battery was the perfect MacGuffin to keep the Olympic tie-in going and helped extend the story to get more events involved with story mode, but having to explain the situation to each new character becomes banal from the player's perspective. The pacing is also odd, as it seems that the console the characters are stuck inside is approaching imminent battery death — but sure, we have time to play rugby and go surfing!

Bouncing back and forth between the retro and modern games wasn't overly jarring, but had some unnecessary overlap in dialogue. It's a bummer that most of the retro events simply involve mashing the A Button as fast as you can. I thought we left that gameplay back in the '80s where it belongs! None of the inputs would break a controller (I'm looking at you, Mario Party), and most were broken up with other inputs, but it felt stale.

The games themselves can't all be winners, of course. Standouts among my family were Rugby Sevens, Skateboarding, Football (Soccer), Dream Shooting, Archery, Boxing and Fencing, but there didn't seem to be many that were total duds. Most events that had lack of interest were because they were too complicated to play easily — like Surfing and Rock Climbing — or were too simple, like Hurdles, Canoeing or most of the retro games.

The game is good family fun, has several events that are worth the entry fee and has many different ways to play with up to four people. The story mode is OK — it would be nice to have more options in some events, and some events get repetitive, but overall my family enjoyed it and would recommend it. **— BRETT**

8.0

In the Absence of Style Savvy . . .
MODEL DEBUT #NICOLA

WHAT'S A TOKYO-CENTRIC issue of Nintendo Force without a look at what Japan can do best: be super stylish! Model Debut #nicola is a dress-up job sim based on real-world fashion magazine nicola (always written with a lowercase n), where you are the newest "Nico-Mo" (nicola model) showcasing fashion in print, TV and maybe even beyond. If the premise sounds a little familiar, another nicola collaboration game for the 3DS was localized as Girls' Fashion Shoot by Rising Star Games in 2013. This game hasn't been picked up for Western localization (yet?) but if you understand elementary Japanese and are a big Style Savvy/Style Boutique fan, then this is the perfect way to scratch that itch while we wait for that franchise to appear on the Switch.

You're given four jobs to complete every month, which range from traditional magazine photoshoots to ad campaigns, TV appearances and promotional events. While you're provided a work wardrobe by the nicola editorial team, the rest of your modeling work requires you to dress up appropriately, so put that hard-earned cash into filling your closet! Doing a good job requires you to stick to your theme: for example, "a girly outfit with white shorts" or "a rock outfit with a gold necklace and earrings." The menu features a search function to filter keywords out, as well as an and/or button to refine your results. Once you're properly attired, you'll have your photoshoot, and then lay out your page with decorative borders, backgrounds and clip art like the ubiquitous "print club" photo sticker machines that are all the rage in Japan. Your editor will give you feedback on what you've chosen, but there's no real penalty in getting things "wrong" except for the amount of money you earn. What matters is the number of fans you earn, which puts you up the model rankings and unlocks other media jobs, as well as opportunities to travel overseas for photo (and bonding!) opportunities.

Aside from modeling, the story also allows you to give advice to your fellow models, as well as — gasp! — a romantic subplot! There's a trio of young men connected to your production company you can get to know, and as you do, their "BF File" fills up with their secrets. Helping your fellow Nico-Mos along and developing a relationship with the possible romantic interests is dependent on dialogue choices, which sometimes can lead to a surprise photo opportunity. It's adorable, but also fairly simplistic.

If you're just starting out learning how to read Japanese, you might want to get in some practice first. The real-world nicola is written for a tween audience, so the dialogue has furigana in many situations, and there are times that the required keywords will also be highlighted with brackets. If you've got a good Japanese-to-English dictionary around, I'd recommend having it by your side. Where a beginning reader will trip up is filming the TV dramas, where you'll need to select the correct poses and facial expressions to fit the dialogue. (It is possible to get the best outcome using trial and error, but that's time consuming.)

While I mostly played using the touchscreen, the Pro Controller worked just as well, except for times when I was trying to maneuver to a selection surrounded by greyed-out options in the wardrobe menu. Some other problems I had with the overall design were the fact that there's no button or menu option to completely remove an outfit — something that should have been essential right off the bat — and there's no way to register a "favorite" coordinate. Also, the 3D modeling is not as refined — there is a *lot* of clipping of hair and clothing parts through other objects, especially with some of the more "fluffy" hairstyles. Probably the most unintentionally funny errors are with some of the wording on the clothing — imagine wearing a purple hoodie with black ribbon reading "GILR POWER" going down each sleeve!

I paid the same cost to import as I would pay for a AAA title here, but I thought it was well worth the hassle. If you're a beginning Japanese student looking for a chance to expand your vocabulary, and are also a huge fan of fashion and uplifting your friends, then this game is right up your alley — or runway, rather! **— REBECCA**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: FURYU RATING: CERO A

7.0

Let's Get the Ball Rolling!

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA BLITZ HD

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SEGA
RATING: E10+

AS SOMETHING OF a Super Monkey Ball novice (only having played it a few times on the GameCube demo unit when I worked at Blockbuster), I was eager to jump into Banana Blitz HD and finally experience one of the titles in full. Prior to that, however, I opted to hunt down a copy of the original Wii version of this game for comparison's sake.

I wasn't very impressed with what I played. The motion controls felt clunky and sometimes unintuitive (just pausing the game requires you to hold the button for several seconds), and the 50 included minigames felt more miss than hit.

The HD version, on the other hand, does away with the motion controls and relies on a more conventional control scheme. New to the series with Banana Blitz was the addition of a jump button, and while a divisive inclusion, I didn't find it particularly problematic.

I had a great time with the stages I got to play, which have a sort of Marble Madness-like theme of rolling a ball (piloted by a monkey inside) through an obstacle course of ramps, pits, bumpers and more. For me, the controls just worked so much better here, and I felt more, well, in control. Even early stages I found troublesome in the Wii version felt much more manageable here — not always easy, but like I had a greater degree of determining the outcome.

Unfortunately, the normal Super Monkey Ball stages only account for 90% of the main game, as Banana Blitz added something else new to the series: bosses.

Banana Blitz's bosses are basically just giant toilets for you to flush all your lives down. They might not be so bad, except that more often than not, one slight "mistake" — such as it can be called when the camera helps obscure a great many things — is fatal, sending you back to the beginning of the battle. While this is true of the normal courses, it somehow feels less egregious here.

Eventually, they become exercises in tedium as you repeatedly make your way through the cool enough mini-stages that they call home until you reach the part that is all but guaranteed to send you careening helplessly into the abyss — something which is relatively rare, if not absent, in the normal stages. Even the most fun of these will no doubt wear your patience down to but a nub before some stroke of luck seems to decide that today is the day you'll win.

I can't even imagine how awful it must be to try facing these guys with motion controls. As it is, I was only able to get through half of the main campaign because of them.

Speaking of the camera, that's one element of the game that is ill-suited to those prone to motion sickness. Moving with the analog stick causes the camera to tilt and bob everywhere, giving an illusion of the world tilting to move the eponymous Monkey Balls. I'm not normally bothered by motion sickness in games, but even I found it unpleasant after a while. The default sensitivity is 5, and you can adjust it in a menu to 10 (*lots* of movement) or 1 (less movement). Sadly, you can't just turn off the camera tilt entirely so you can just focus on rolling the ball.

Extras include online ranking, decathlon and time attack modes in addition to the main game, while the minigames have been trimmed from a fat 50 to a lean 10. Most of these are alright, but probably not a main draw.

Your enjoyment of Banana Blitz HD is going to come down to how well you can handle the bosses. Sadly, about 10% of the game stands in the way of enjoying the other 90. **— DAVID**

7.5

So Much Fun, It's Spooky!

LUIGI'S MANSION 3

LUIGI, IT'S BEEN a while!

Well, in a sense, at least. Although we did get Luigi's Mansion 2 (Dark Moon) in 2013, we've only had three collective Luigi's Mansion games in nearly two decades. That's not enough! Time and time again either Nintendo directly or Next Level Games delivered, showing us that Luigi does have depth beyond the facade of "the green guy who you force your younger brother to play as." After years of being relegated to "Player 2" status, Luigi showed us that he has the ability to buck up and become the star. Luigi's Mansion 3 only reaffirms that observation.

Once again we see Luigi visit a haunted building — but this time the setup is a bit different. Instead of being lured into a mysterious mansion or being tasked with saving a valley, Luigi and his friends all decide to relax at the Last Resort hotel and spa. Within minutes the entire affair is revealed to be a ruse, led by chief antagonist and hotel owner Hellen Graveley, who is in cahoots with King Boo (Luigi's main nemesis who isn't named Waluigi). Commence chicanery, ghost catching and light puzzle solving.

Over the course of the roughly 15-hour game, you'll head from floor to floor using a fast-travel-esque elevator to transport yourself into different worlds. At the end of each floor is another elevator button, possibly held hostage by a big boss fight or a puzzle: Grab it, then repeat the process. It sounds rote, but it's actually one of the most refreshing loops in recent memory.

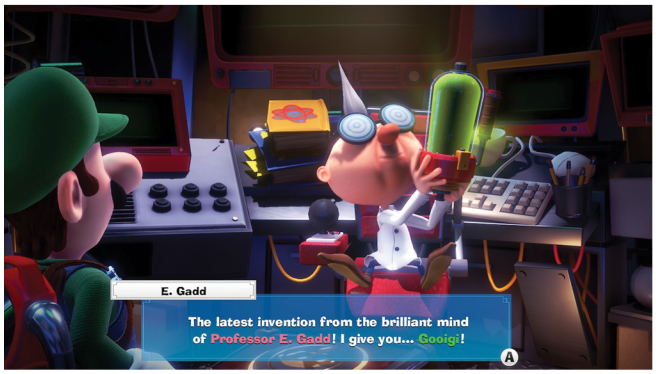
Every single floor offers something wildly different, from a medieval theme to "haunted houseplant." I don't want to spoil them all here, but just know that with each floor change I was shocked at how far the team managed to stretch the formula. Somehow everything remains thematic, with some floors providing new hazards or enemy types that are never repeated again. That's the kind of game Luigi's Mansion 3 is: It never lets any idea overstay its welcome.

Thankfully Next Level Games also added one extra element into the fray that's seemingly innocuous, but ended up becoming my favorite single aspect of the game: Gooigi. Simply put, this monstrosity of slime is a friendly minion cooked up by your NPC ally Professor E. Gadd, and he provides a new dimension to puzzle solving while also doubling as a fully playable co-op partner.

Basically Gooigi rests on your back in goo form and can be called out at any time — and you'll need him to slip through bars and do other goo-like things using his helpfully amorphous body. Suddenly you'll find yourself searching for grates and other things Gooigi might be able to dive into (though it never gets to the point where you're pixel hunting).

Best of all, Gooigi can be activated as a co-op partner with the press of a menu option, with drop-in and drop-out play. This is actually my preferred way to enjoy Luigi's Mansion 3, as you can simultaneously put two heads together to solve puzzles and battle bosses. It also speeds things up considerably when another player can move through grates in real time while you're investigating another area.

I do wish there were something more to spend your cash on early on in the campaign. Sucking up nearly anything and everything in a level is fun to do (especially when things go flying all over the place), but at the end of the day all you can basically buy is a few extra lives you don't need (in the form of golden dog bones) and collectible finders. It's a trend that a lot of other open-world games have been doing to entice even the least adventurous players to slowly locate



all of the extras, but more item variety would spice up the early game.

If you're not satisfied with the main campaign, you can extend your time with the ScareScraper mode, which returns from the second game. Somehow Next Level Games took the idea of a roguelike randomized dungeon and reinvigorated it, to the point where this side mode is more fun than a lot of full titles. The fact that it supports multiplayer both locally and online is the icing on the cake – just remember you need a Switch Online subscription now if you want to take advantage of the latter.

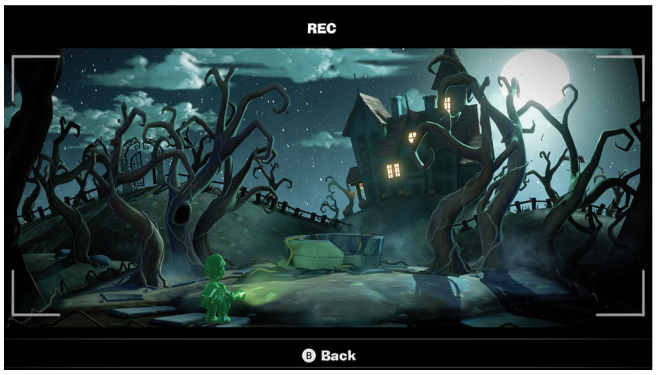
Sadly, Luigi's Mansion 3 falls completely flat with its ScreamPark mode, which functions as a sort of Mario Party lite. This gametype doesn't do the other brother justice, as none of the minigames in tow are worth playing even once. Not even once! Ghost Hunt, which is a battle royale of sorts (the classic sense, not the new popular genre) that grants players points for catching enemies, seems fun at first, but quickly gets old as the same few ghost types cycle in and out. Cannon Barrage's pacing is completely off, as you're required to slowly acquire a cannon ball, run up a ramp to place it in a cannon, then fire it off. By the time it actually hits a target you might already be asleep.

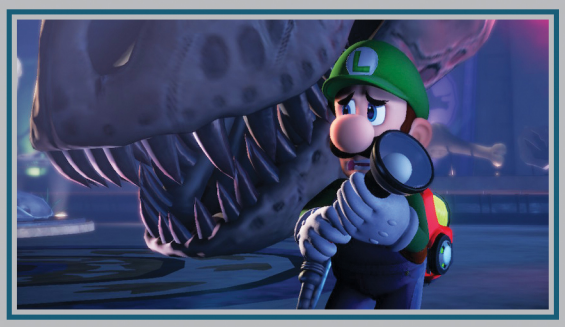
Coin Floating, a mode that's basically just a lite version of an existing boss fight, might be the dullest of them all. Here you're just (true to its name) collecting coins while floating around in the water, with devastating results if you hit a mine. When you consider that this is a completely extraneous mode, it smarts a whole lot less. Still, I wouldn't count on ScreamPark giving you any sort of respite once you've finished up the story and the ScareScraper.

Despite some misgivings with the extras, the actual core Luigi's Mansion 3 experience is one of the best adventures of 2019. Go at it alone with the lights off or grab a friend and have at it – you won't be disappointed by this third entry, which has completely justified the existence of this little subseries that could all on its own!
– CHRIS

9.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NEXT LEVEL GAMES
RATING: E





SECOND OPINION
IT'S GOOD TO BE SCARED

I GAVE OUR old pal Luigi a bit of a hard time in our final preview of Luigi's Mansion 3 a couple of issues ago, hammering him on his scaredy-cat nature and wondering why he hasn't gained a bit more courage after all these years of busting ghosts. But playing through the gloriously fun and funny Luigi's Mansion 3, I wouldn't have this hero act any other way! A stoic, unmoved mountain of machismo who didn't react with screams of terror at the jump scares and spectral antics swirling around him at every turn just wouldn't be nearly as much fun. So it's better that we've got our good old scaredy-cat Luigi here once again, still leaping out of his socks in fright at even the slightest hint of a spook all the way through this grand adventure.

Chris has it right when he says the gameplay loop Next Level came up with for this sequel is sensational – it's a joy to focus your efforts on fully exploring one floor of the towering hotel at a time, creeping through and finding all its secrets and sucking up all its lurking ghosts before ultimately claiming the next elevator button from that floor's final boss and starting the cycle back over again. Luckily, that routine also gets broken up a few times throughout the quest too, so the rinse-and-repeat nature of it all never ends up feeling repetitive. And there's also freedom to revisit cleared floors later on whenever you feel like it, should you want to go back and hunt for treasures you might have missed the first time through.

Chris is also on the money, though, when he points out that there's a bit too much money to be found here – and not enough to do with it. The game is easy enough that most players should be able to succeed without ever spending any of their cash on the items available in Professor E. Gadd's shop, and the overall accumulated cash total only impacts the end of the game in a fairly minor way: You can earn a Rank C, Rank B or Rank A finish depending on how much your bank account holds at the end. The older Luigi's Mansion games had more possible endings, so LM3 could have at least matched the precedent set in the past – but other in-game purchase options would have been nice. Alternate colors for Luigi's clothes could have been easy to offer, since they're already in the game and used in the multiplayer modes.

Though the cash could have used more functionality, it's undeniably fun to gather it all. The physics that fuel the fluttering of dollar bills in the air and the coins and gold bars clattering along the ground are wonderful – in fact, nearly every room in this haunted hotel is packed with physics-affected objects, making it a blast to just rampage through and suck up everything in sight in a whirlwind of destructive cleanliness. And it's that aspect of this game, along with its amazing graphics, that makes me excited for how Nintendo will push environmental interaction further in the future! **– LUCAS**

9.5

9.0

How Does the Fox Play?

NEW SUPER LUCKY'S TALE

THERE HAVE BEEN a surprising number of games coming to Switch from Microsoft Game Studios as of late, and as a launch title for the Xbox One X, you'd be forgiven for thinking that New Super Lucky's Tale was one of them. Rather, this one has been brought to the hybrid platform by Playful Corp, and is a bit different from its previous iteration, besides.

Calling back to the '90s when mascot platformers were all the rage – but few delivered the quality of a Mario or a Sonic – Lucky is the real deal. While he may not do much in the way of breaking new ground, what is here is extremely solid and full of charm, if a bit on the easier side of things (it may even be easier than its previous iteration).

But then again, so is Kirby, which really feels to me like a good comparison for what level of challenge can be expected throughout. Challenge is relative, anyway, but this nevertheless feels like a good place to start for newcomers to 3D platforming adventures. If you're a veteran who isn't hung up on challenge, then there's plenty to enjoy on this ride.

Speaking of veterans, those who have played Super Lucky's Tale before are likely to notice that there are indeed several changes to this version – certainly enough to justify the "New" in the Switch release's title. From the very beginning, the story has been retconned and revamped to add a bit more epic lore to Lucky's tale, and there are more distinct characters and characterization all around. Even Lucky somehow seems to have a little more personality now, which was one of my few grievances with the previous iteration.

Lucky moves better, too: in addition to feeling smoother, he can now slide on surfaces too hard to burrow through, while his dive can also act as a homing attack against nearby enemies (though not to such a degree as Sonic uses his, mind). The camera has been improved as well; whereas you could only nudge it a little this way or that before, you can now move it freely as you please.

Worlds have been reimagined to have new designs and enemies, while still adhering to the themes of the originals. A different lighting system is in place, but more noticeable are the addition of backgrounds where there were once only black voids before. Overall, the progression just feels better here, though it can also feel like it's a bit on the short side, as you can challenge the bosses of each world after completing only a handful of stages if you're thorough.

Furthermore, the two batches of downloadable content – Gilly Island and the Guardian Trials – have been incorporated into this version, and rather seamlessly at that.

If you're the sort who likes deep dives into the development of a game, then you'll probably understand when I say that Super Lucky's Tale feels like a prototype for New Super Lucky's Tale. That's no slight on the old game, but rather an indication of how much the new game stands above it.

Ah, but with all this talk of what's new in New, one can almost forget about what's remained the same, which is the core of the game. As noted before, this is a cartoon mascot sort of 3D platformer in which you explore various stages accessed through hub worlds, searching for collectibles needed in order to unlock further progression. In short, it's basically like your Super Mario 64s, Banjo-Kazooies, Yooka-Laylees and the like.

However, the folks at Playful have more things than that going on to spice things up. While most stages are of the 3D sandbox variety, others act as 2D platformers not unlike Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze (including going into the background in parts). Still others are auto-runners, which are built upon the same moves and abilities you use in the other stages, and are quite fun examples of that gameplay style (and just a little more challenging, since you can't backtrack if you miss something).

Then there are the puzzle rooms, which start easy, but can throw some real brain-benders your way by the end. Unfortunately, these rooms can bring with them one of the game's few real flaws: load times. While these are generally unintrusive, dealing with them every time you need to reset a puzzle can be a bit tedious.

With this being the third iteration of the same game since it debuted in 2016, it looks like the Switch has ended up with what could easily be called the definitive version of this super tale. If only fans on other platforms could be so lucky! **– DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: PLAYFUL RATING: E

8.0

How to Build a Better Burger
BURGERTIME PARTY!

TIME HAS NOT been kind to BurgerTime.

Originally a coin-op contemporary of major hits like Pac-Man, Donkey Kong and Mario Bros. in the early '80s, BurgerTime has sadly not been able to build nearly as large a lasting legacy as those fellows from the golden age of arcades. A humble handful of sequels and reboots have been spread across the past four decades, but they've been so few and far-between that it'd be perfectly understandable for younger gamers to have no idea that this series exists at all — or what it's all about!

Well, BurgerTime is all about building burgers. Enormous burgers. Gigantic, humongous, call-Guinness-World-Records-and-have-them-come-over-with-a-tape-measure-and-an-industrial-scale kind of burgers. These entrées are so oversized that their preparer, the good Chef Peter Pepper, has to physically walk across the tops of each layer of ingredients and stomp them down, step by step, until they fall down and land on the massive serving plate placed at the bottom of the screen. (Please don't actually cook anything using your feet in real life. Health code violations, you know.)

As Peter is scrambling around maze-like configurations of platforms and ladders to reach each burger component and stomp it flat, a series of angry, living, probably edible enemies chase after him to try to scramble him instead. The Food Foes can be stopped in their tracks temporarily, though, by a sprinkling of Peter's pepper. You get three shakes of the shaker by default, and you'll have to use them judiciously while you try to juke the baddies — though you also get three lives by default too, so getting tagged by an ambling Egg or hateful Hot Dog isn't too much of a setback most of the time.

Perhaps this core gameplay was too limited for future developers to be able to iterate on? It's true there's not a lot going on here besides moving around the screen and occasionally shaking pepper at a Pickle, but you'd think in almost 40 years more would have tried their luck at updating the old classic.

Well, missed opportunities of the past aside, what G-Mode has cooked up here in BurgerTime Party! is great.

This is first and foremost a faithful update of the arcade original, giving the classic maze-running, ingredient-stomping gameplay a visual facelift with a winning cartoon style. Peter Pepper himself has a better design than ever before (older depictions had him as a huge-nosed old man, among other less-than-flattering portrayals), and the Food Foes' flailing frustration is on point too. The level design sticks to the simplicity of 1982 to begin with, then introduces more modern ideas like breakable floors and ladders and air ducts that work to warp Peter from one point in a kitchen to another in an instant. A three-star ranking system encourages you to not just clear each level, but to do so as creatively and expertly as possible, squashing and dropping Food Foes in groups to earn extra bonus points.

But the real selling point here (and my own personal great idea, of course), is the multiplayer. BurgerTime World Tour, an older reboot from eight years ago, also boasted four-player play — but that was split-screen, and that game's take on the core gameplay was untraditional. (It 3D-ified everything and placed the playing field on the outside of a cylinder.) But Party! is all single-screen mayhem. It's a great option for households with four Joy-Cons available, as a whole couch full of players can compete to build the best burgers — or even work together in the co-op mode that's also offered.

This kind of reverent, respectful and thoughtful update is exactly what an '80s arcade title like BurgerTime needed. And you know what? Mario Bros., Donkey Kong and even Pac-Man haven't inspired remakes like this any time recently. Perhaps BurgerTime was just biding its time all along — and with the Switch, it was finally time to fire up the grill again! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH
PUBLISHER: XSEED
DEVELOPER: G-MODE
RATING: E

8.5

Ringing in the New Year

RING FIT ADVENTURE

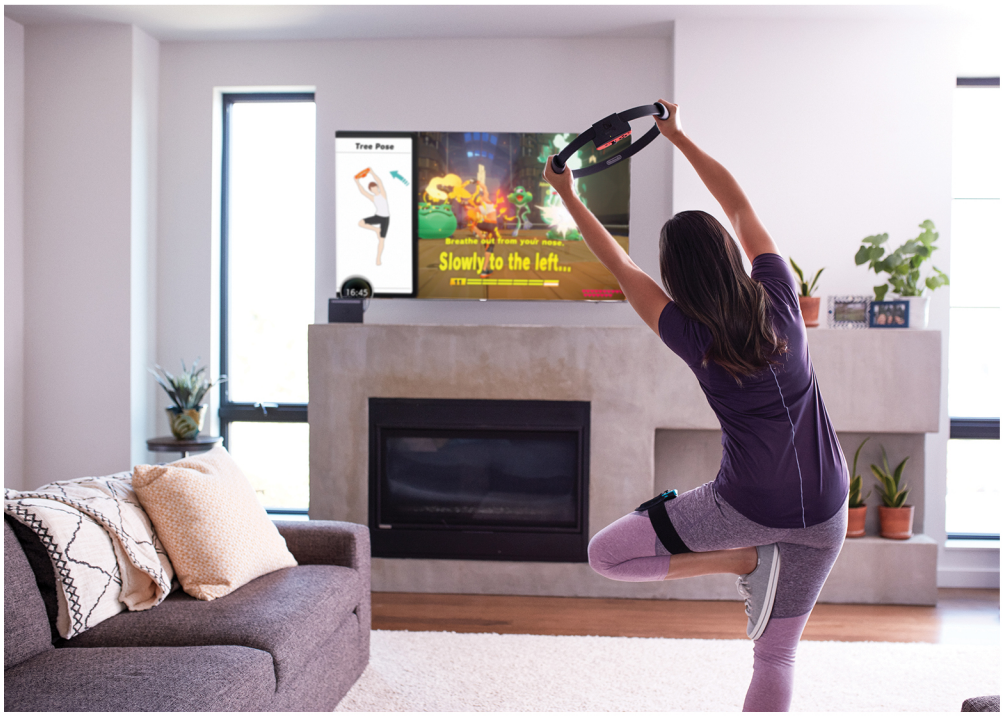
HAIL, ADVENTURER! Dost thou desire to partake in a quest that shall make thine abs like steel?

. . . But thou must!

Well OK, it's not *exactly* Dragon Quest with squats. But Ring Fit Adventure manages to blend two unlikely genres together into a bold new follow-up to Wii Fit, complete with a bonkers new signature accessory.

The Ring-Con – a rubber pilates ring that comes bundled with every copy of the game – is specifically for use with the Switch and your right Joy-Con. Most of the game can be navigated simply by squeezing, pulling or turning the Ring-Con, and the device is quite responsive and durable throughout all this activity. The left Joy-Con, meanwhile, nestles snugly into the included Velcro leg strap and detects lower body exercise. Between the two peripherals, the title can recognize a range of movement that rivals our old pal the Balance Board.

The main Adventure Mode tasks players with traversing over 20 worlds – each spanning multiple stages and challenges – in pursuit of the brawny, troublemaking bodybuilder dragon, Drageaux. The gameplay progression and storyline are both very straightforward, but Ring Fit Adventure does whip out a few fun narrative surprises from time to time. It's hardly a deep plot, but it's nice that Nintendo tucked away a few intriguing bits here and there considering the genre's pedigree for spinning a good yarn.



The game's courses are selectable from a Mario-style map, and not unlike the portly plumber, your hero or heroine will dash through a colorful, linear stage in an effort to reach the goal. Of course, the difference here is that you're jogging in real time to get through the levels. To keep things interesting, you can shoot air puffs by squeezing the Ring-Con, vacuum things up by pulling it and jump by blasting air downward. There's a surprising amount of variety included in these sequences, with context-sensitive sections utilizing the Ring-Con as a gizmo to zipline, row a boat, crush boulders and more. Treasure chests and goodies are squirreled away around every corner for the observant player, while the world map's shops, NPCs, a currency system and even a *skill tree* really bring the RPG feeling home!

Even more true to the spirit of RPGs is level-driven, turn-based combat, and Ring Fit Adventure goes all-in with this concept! In most stages, you face off against fitness-themed monsters, each with their own specialized attacks. Be prepared to flex both brain and brawn for these battles as you select which moves you'd like to unleash based on the number of enemies they target and the color type each possesses. Once the attack is chosen, it's time to sweat! The Ring Fit Adventurer can somehow deal damage to foes by unleashing various workout routines, but it's up to the player to do the required moves. Each attack "session" consists of numerous reps, so the exercise portion of these

battles can be quite strenuous, especially compared to the stop-and-go nature of Wii Fit. You're also judged on how accurate your poses are — good form means stronger attacks, and different enemies are weak to different parts of your body!

That's all well and good, but here's the burning question: *Does it work?* Well, if my aching muscles have anything to say about it . . . yes! The fact that the battles require not just multiple reps per attack but several attack sequences means that the action is a lot more relentless than in Wii Fit, and it's easy to want to push yourself for the rewards the game doles out at regular intervals. I'm a 34-year-old man of average build and I was feeling the burn from my half-hour daily workouts on difficulty level 20.

Wait, level 20? That's right — not to be confused with your character's experience level, the generous amount of difficulty levels range from 1 to 30. This affects the number of each rep required as well as how long you have to hold the poses. As a result, while I was grateful that the game made me collapse into a writhing heap after my 18th plank, my seven-month pregnant wife Sarah was still able to enjoy a more easygoing workout routine! There are also options for low-impact jogging (for the courteous upstairs neighbor) and a way to set troublesome areas to simply require a button press. The latter option is a little lacking, though; I tried it with knee exercises since I have old man knees, and it didn't apply to the squats that were really causing me issues. So your mileage may vary there.

And on the note of things not working, the leg strap is a finicky beast, frequently slipping or even desyncing entirely to the point where I have to do some exercises sideways, with my left Joy-Con facing the Switch.

While the core gameplay is just a touch repetitive and the recycling of stages is a bit too frequent, Ring Fit Adventure absolutely hits its goal of making working out fun. It's packed with content, looks and sounds great, and like any good adventure, even manages to pack in new gameplay elements and surprises dozens of hours into the game! The Switch has hosted a bunch of great RPGs, but you should clear (a lot of) space on your shelf for this one as well. After all, where else can you level up in real life alongside your in-game avatar?
— MATTHEW T.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E10+

SECOND OPINION
RESOLUTION SOLUTION

I'VE HAD EXPERIENCE exercising with video games; my first Nintendo Entertainment System came with the Power Pad, I was a big Wii Fit fan and I regularly practiced Dance Dance Revolution on my home dance pad so I could wow the spectators whenever I was at an arcade. Nowadays, my time for exercise has been mostly eaten away with commuting and running a household, so it's been hard for me to stick to a routine. I was initially skeptical of Ring Fit Adventure and its benefits until I saw the first trailer and heard Kevin Cassidy singing its praises after he got an opportunity to test it out, and I was immediately sold.

The ring is amazing — I thought it'd warp or crack under all the strain I put it under, but it is extremely solid and springy, with a good deal of resistance and haptic feedback from slotting the right Joy-Con in at the top. It's always fun to see how high your power meter can go when you squeeze it to start the game! There are so many ways to manipulate it, too, through swinging it around, pushing and pulling — Nintendo thought of everything. The only exercise that I had trouble doing was squeezing the ring between my knees, as it was prone to slipping a lot. I did not have as much trouble with the leg strap for the left Joy-Con as Matt did, but I would have liked the elastic Velcro strap to be just a little bit longer. I also don't know if this is an issue with my Joy-Cons, but using the ring to navigate maps was sometimes difficult, as it would take a few tries for the game to register my movements.

While Wii Fit had more of an emphasis on balance and gentle exercise, Ring Fit is all about non-stop action and working up a good sweat. Many of the activities reminded me of my time trying out EA Sports Active, which was a competitor to Wii Fit that also used a strap-on pocket for the Nunchuk to track movement. Running through the varied landscapes made me feel like I was charging my battery for the enemy encounters, which were often somewhat of a challenge, although I felt like the yoga exercises were a lot more difficult than others. There was one part where I needed to level grind; I found myself in a boss battle against Drageaux that made me take a brief detour through previous levels before I finally had the stats to give him a proper thrashing, but it was worth it.

I'm traveling through the story as my schedule allows, and even with exercising only a few times a week I'm beginning to feel a difference in my overall energy levels — shoveling snow after a small storm was no sweat, for instance. Hopefully I'll be able to gradually increase my frequency and my reps in the New Year — this is one game where grinding is politely discouraged, after all. If you've got an original model Switch and a New Year's resolution to get fit, this is the perfect place to start! **— REBECCA**

8.0

8.5

Digital Detectives

DIGIMON STORY: CYBER SLEUTH – COMPLETE EDITION

HIGH NOON. A tendril of steam curls above the cafeteria, as two opposing armies gather around the jungle gym — Pokémon Masters on one side, Digimon Champions on the other. There can be no compromise. This is war.

Fast-forward roughly 20 years, and the situation's completely changed. Pokémon dominates the monster-catching genre in pop culture, while Digimon developed a copycat reputation, then gradually stopped being localized in the West. That trend changed when Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth and its sort-of sequel Hacker's Memory released on PlayStation 4 and PlayStation Vita. Now the two are available on Nintendo Switch, combined into one convenient — and conveniently priced — package.

Like Shin Megami Tensei, the Cyber games take place in a futuristic Tokyo. Here, business, communication and daily life in general all revolve around EDEN, a corporate-owned virtual reality program connecting people's avatars to goods and services they need. That's good . . . but it's also a hotbed of cybercrime.

In this version of Tokyo, hackers are the lowlifes of society — digital mercenaries who run black markets, steal people's identities, wreck businesses and take on less than savory tasks from equally unsavory clients. After a freak accident in the first Cyber game leaves the protagonist half digital and half human, they join a cyber sleuth detective agency run (read: solely staffed) by the glamorous Kyoko Kuremi. The pair take on cases across Tokyo, ranging from the ghost girl in the mall's air conditioning to more sinister mysteries where the Digital World bleeds into the real one, and people fall into comas when Eaters (creatures like Persona's Shadows) consume their data in EDEN.

Hacker's Memory expands the story, but from the viewpoint of Keisuke, the ordinary un-hero who joins a noble hacker group to regain his stolen identity. It's a much more personal — often darker — story, and it offers a compelling alternative take on the original plot from an outsider's perspective. It also features improved localization and some larger setpiece battles with different rules.

Though there is some padding with the urgent quest system between main missions that drags the pacing down, it's a solid narrative across both stories. More importantly, it's a big step up from the paper-thin, all too familiar plotlines of earlier Digimon games.

The SMT comparisons go beyond the plot and setting. Exploiting type and element weaknesses makes all the difference between life and Digi-death, and like with demon fusing, you shouldn't get too attached to any one Digimon. Your goal is to raise them up, learn specific skills and enhance certain stats to eventually let them Digivolve into something stronger.

How much you focus on Digivolving depends on your preferences. Stat crunchers can spend hours developing an unbeatable team, yet casual fans can hop through the Digivolution lines as they please and adjust the game's difficulty to keep from being overwhelmed. It's surprisingly flexible.

The Switch port adds a slew of content previously available as DLC only, including both helpful items and powerful Digimon. You won't be able to take full advantage of them early on and steamroll your opponents, though. There's a party memory capacity function that limits how many strong Digimon you can use until later.

Unfortunately, the slightly more baffling localization in the first game remains, as do the less than helpful map system and inability to keep track of mission requirements. Still, it's a solid port technically speaking, and these are minor complaints about two otherwise excellent monster-taming games with something for almost every playstyle. **— JOSH**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO
DEVELOPER: MEDIA VISION
RATING: T

Just Like a '90s Arcade

THE NINJA SAVIORS: RETURN OF THE WARRIORS

WHO'S COOLER, robots or ninjas? It's a very '80s question, harkening back to a time when ninja films and cyborg movies were pretty much everywhere. Game publisher Taito answered it with another question: "Why don't we have both?". Enter The Ninja Warriors, a 1987 game about two of the slowest, heaviest ninjas you've ever seen. Their excuse? They were robots all along! What a gimmick, right? Too bad that actually playing it was pretty darn tedious.

The concept was solid though, leading to a full remake for the SNES in 1994. The single-plane beat-'em-up structure (seen in other action games of the era like Kung-Fu, Altered Beast and Shinobi) was retained, but everything else was rebuilt from the ground up. The Ninja Saviors: Return of the Warriors ports this now 20+ year old game to HD consoles, this time with some new art and two new unlockable playable characters, bringing the total cyborg ninja hero count to five. Once again, the results are a mixed bag, mostly because of the inherent design limitations of the source material — but boy howdy did the development team do their darndest to have fun with it.

They just don't make them like this anymore. Enemies include chainsaw maniacs, slime men, power hungry CEOs and a perennial favorite from the 16-bit era: ladies who can jump very high. Cut them and their blood runs green — presumably to avoid Nintendo's once-harsh censorship standards. If that sounds archaic, just wait until you play it!

Under its new paint job this is a game from 1994, so it can't harness any of the advances made to the genre by later innovators like Viewtiful Joe or Smash Bros. Every character can walk and attack, and . . . that's it. At least one of the game's starting lineup (a big blue Ninja named, uh, "Ninja") can't even jump! The game doesn't go out of its way to encourage you to do more than that either. You can get through the first stage pretty easily by just walking forward and mashing attack.

That changes once you get to the first boss. He's a giant named, uh, "Gigant," and he doesn't fall easily, though he can knock you down anytime he wants. You won't get past him unless you learn how to use special attacks. Every second you don't take a hit, you gain some special meter. Once it's fully charged, you can unleash a screen-filling attack. A partial charge can be used for some character-specific special moves, like throwing stars or a slide tackle. Take a hit and you lose your juice, so you have to be careful if you're ever going to max out. Learning each character's specials and combos while managing your meter is where the game's depth kicks in. The five playable fighters here are all vastly different — especially the last two: a short and stocky robot lady whose arms can stretch like Inspector Gadget, and a massive mechanical man named Raiden who feels like a boss in his own right.

After you've played through a few levels with each character, you might just be impressed with the amount of mechanics hidden under the hood — but then just like that, it's all over. At just eight stages, most will be able to burn through The Ninja Saviors in about an hour, after they get the hang of using specials. If more were done to teach and reward players for using advanced techniques, it could be fun to speedrun or learn new combos. But as it stands, only the most internally motivated robo-shinobi fanatics will bother.

— JONATHAN

7.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ININ GAMES DEVELOPER: NATSUMEATARI RATING: T

Back to the Basics

TRINE 4: THE NIGHTMARE PRINCE

FOR OVER A decade, the fine Finns of Frozenbyte have been blessing the gaming industry with the Trine series, an ongoing saga of multiplayer puzzle/platformers defined by their absolutely gorgeous graphics. It's been a long time since I experienced the brand firsthand — the last installment I played was Trine 2: Director's Cut way back at the Wii U launch over seven years ago — so I was excited to see what new tricks Frozenbyte had conjured up for Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince.

And, well . . . not too many!

I missed Trine 3 myself, but apparently it was something of a deviation from the formula, making Trine 4 a course-correcting return to what had worked before. So seven years later I'm back to playing something eerily similar to that Wii U Trine 2! It's just as well, because the gameplay balance the developers achieved in those first Trines was pretty much perfect.

There are three heroes (all controlled simultaneously if you have enough players active, or else you swap between them when flying solo): Amadeus the Wizard, who can conjure boxes out of thin air and levitate objects around the screen; Zoya the Thief, who can shoot arrows and fire a grappling hook; and Pontius the Knight, who can swing his sword, wield his shield and throw his weight around to both solve puzzles and defeat foes. Playing Trine is a constant dance of all three characters, taking on puzzle after puzzle with somehow continously unique combinations of their skillsets. It's immensely satisfying! It's no wonder this series has reached its fourth installment.

And, I have to say again, the graphics painting each and every scene to life are just breathtaking. Frozenbyte already had beautiful vistas on lockdown in this series over 10 years ago, and now they're just so good at rendering them it's crazy. It's nearly worth playing these games just for the scenery!

The icing on the cake is that Trine 4 is a budget-priced release, so you can snag a copy for $20 or less. You should! **— LUCAS**

9.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: MODUS GAMES DEVELOPER: FROZENBYTE RATING: E10+

9.0

A Countryside Stroll

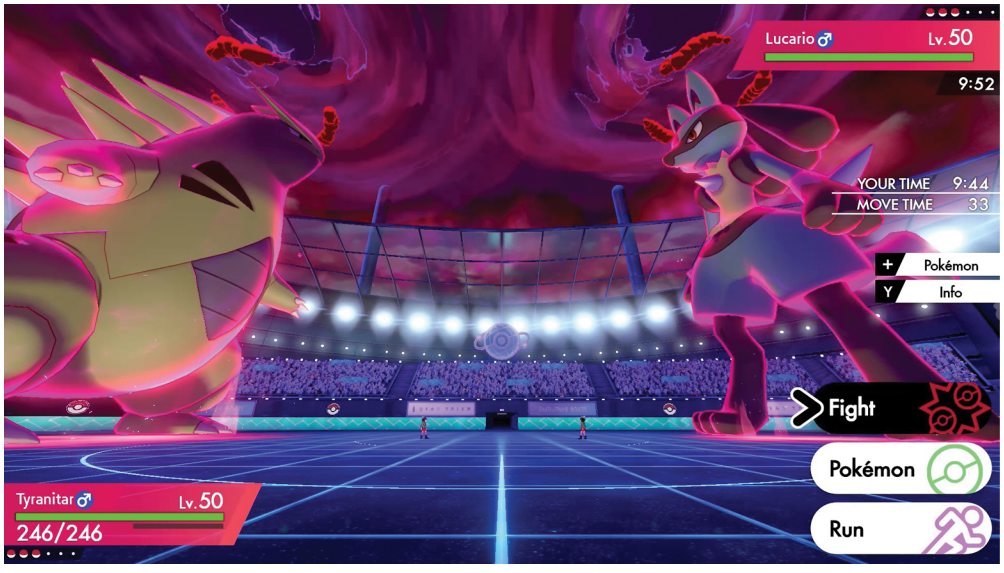
POKÉMON SHIELD

AFTER TWO YEARS of patient waiting, Pokémon Sword & Shield are finally here! The eighth generation of Pokémon has begun, and it happens in the British-flavored region of Galar this time around, filled with gorgeous detail-laden scenery, all-new Gym Leaders to battle and brand-new Pokémon. The move to the Switch has done wonders for the graphics, as Sword & Shield have some of the best sights of any Pokémon game so far. Thanks to Art Director James Turner, each town and route is shining with character that really reflects the real-life country of England that it is based on, from the countryside hills to the bustling streets of London-tinged Wyndon. Additionally, the various musical themes are better than they've ever been, really hitting a high mark for the 23-year-old series.

Gameplay is the same as it's ever been — capture, train and battle with various elementally powered creatures. However, all is *not* the same: Game Freak has gone the extra mile to cut down on some of the aspects that dragged down past installments, from featuring skippable tutorials and shortened animations to having the ability to fly to previously visited areas available very early in the game. Veterans of past Pokémon games will most likely breeze through the main game (if they choose to), but new and lapsed players should find plenty to love and keep them entertained.

The story featured here is actually kind of threadbare past the familiar "be the best Trainer in the region" bit — to the point where an actual threat to Galar isn't even felt until almost the completion of the main game. What we do have here is a great use of theme: change. This is prevalent all through the adventure, from the mantle of Gym Leader changing hands to the minting of a new Pokémon Professor. Once the main threat is revealed, the theme of change is represented there as well with his reasoning for menacing the Galar region. Heck, even the shift from the 3DS to the Switch works here!

The real star of the eighth generation is the Wild Area, which can best be described as the Safari Zone Done Right. The Wild Area is a vast expanse of land smack-dab in the middle of the region, filled with a massive amount of ever-changing Pokémon to catch and battle. Your number of Gym Badges determines which Pokémon you can catch, as higher-leveled creatures are off-limits until you meet those requirements. Dotted around the Wild Area are shakeable berry trees, glistening items on the ground and powerful Pokémon strutting their stuff. Some of them will come toward you if they spot you, and others will *run after you* like you owe them money. You will also see numerous Pokémon dens around, sometimes emitting red or smoking purple beams of light. These are your invitations to engage in a Dynamax (or more rarely, a Gigantamax) battle, which features supersized Pokémon for you and three other Trainers to defeat and capture.



These battles require strategizing beforehand, especially if you're going in with the game-provided NPC allies. Dynamax battles are great fun, and the rewards are plentiful, from XP-increasing candies to the new single-use move-teaching Technical Records. Gigantamax battles are even better (and more difficult) because the main reward is the Pokémon you can try to catch: While all 'mons can Dynamax, only a few can Gigantamax, which offers these lucky few a completely new form altogether not unlike the Mega Evolutions seen in past games.

And of course, the new Pokémon found within are some of the most imaginative to date, from new cuties like Yamper to the Galar regional variants like Weezing.

Sword & Shield have a lot to love for old and new fans, and they're pure quality from top to bottom. Now let's go camping and making some curry! (You can do that too!) **— THOR**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK
RATING: E

8.0

A First Step Toward the Future

POKÉMON SWORD

WE'RE IN THE "before" phase of a new "before & after" comparison now.

Years from now, plucky young video creators on the Internet are going to be producing previews of the inevitable Generation X, XI or XII Pokémon games, and in describing the graphical grandeur that those future titles have achieved, those video makers will cut back to footage from Sword & Shield with thoughts like "See?! Look how far the series has come since then! Can you remember when the worlds still looked that bad?". And the comments will fill up with hearty agreements — everyone nodding along in the shared wisdom that, yes, Sword & Shield have long since been surpassed.

That's my takeaway from my time spent playing Sword, anyway. (Also, apologies for the flip-flopped placement of these review pages; Thor played the Shield version, but I want to respond to some of his points, so here we are.) I concur with Thor's assessment that the game looks great — but only in part. The Pokémon themselves are skillfully animated . . . sometimes. With some attack animations and their playfulness in the optional Pokémon Camp side activity, they're as lively as a cartoon! But then you get instances like when I called upon my Raboot to use Double Kick and it simply moved into the air a bit up and down. (Twice.) Meanwhile it actually made a kicking motion when I commanded it to use Headbutt!

The game world? Also wonderful — in the main routes. But the much-lauded Wild Area? It's a letdown. Bland, basic geometry with sharp-edged hills and laughable trees. Even worse is the way Pokémon appear there — they all just mill around in circles, wandering aimlessly in grassy spots doing nothing. (While stronger monsters appear alone, between the grassy spots, also walking around in circles doing nothing.) There's nothing natural to the behavior of these creatures. It's immersion-breakingly poor in its execution.

And yet, I don't want to be too negative — because I realize this really is just a first step into the future of the franchise for Game Freak. They were never going to be able to fully capture the true open-world Pokémon experience we've all imagined in our minds for years in their first go in this new era of HD console development for the mainline series — but the Wild Area is evidence that they're pointing their sights in that direction and should get there someday.

The bland story was also a miss for me, as Thor said — but luckily every other aspect was sensational. I adore almost each and every new Pokémon creature design created for this new generation, which is a stunning achievement! Even better, Game Freak clearly endeavored to fill in old gaps in the overall Pokédex by bringing us several new, never-before-seen type combinations. My team boasts an Ice/Bug glamour queen and an Electric/Poison rock star! I never thought I'd see those combos! The best, though, was a non-combo: For the first time in franchise history, my favorite type, Flying, has finally been acknowledged as more than an add-on secondary type through the appearance of the two pre-evolutions of Corviknight, who are both pure Flying! They've never done that before! (Tornadus doesn't count.)

Also here that's never been done before? A Dark-type Gym! And great new Galar region variants of classic 'mons who don't originally hail from Kanto! And a great new streamlined system for updating movesets!

All of those little touches are encouraging to me, telling me that this franchise is on the right track. Sword & Shield stumble in a few areas and history may not be kind to them, but they're setting up a future that I'm excited to see. **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK
RATING: E

Crimes in Neo Tokyo
AI: THE SOMNIUM FILES

IT'S A RAINY Friday evening in November. The corpse of businesswoman Shoko Nadami was found strapped to a carousel horse in an abandoned park . . . her left eye curiously missing. Kaname Date of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police arrives to investigate, only to discover Shoko's 12-year-old daughter Mizuki hiding inside the central column . . . a bloody ice pick gripped in her hands . . .

Thus begins AI: The Somnium Files, a whodunit adventure with a sci-fi bent from Zero Escape series director/writer Kotaro Uchikoshi. That lauded "escape the room" trilogy established Uchikoshi as a master of suspense in the Western market, a status he maintains in this latest project. Even if you don't consider yourself a fan of Japanese adventure games — in which limited interactions serve chiefly to advance the narrative — this tension-filled tale may make you a believer!

As Date, you travel around Tokyo and gather testimony from the likes of sleazy Yakuza gangsters, a shifty politician and an Internet idol famous for Let's Plays of a Minecraft facsimile called ShovelForge. Though they initially appear to be one-note archetypes, smart writing and a strong vocal cast help to inject plenty of depth and nuance. Of particular note is Mizuki — actress Corina Boettger delivers a heartbreaking performance as the troubled preteen, a no-nonsense realist who can't quite suppress the fear and loneliness seeping through her facade.

(Sticking out as a sore thumb is ironically Date himself, who exhibits sporadic episodes of perversion in order to alleviate tense scenarios. I assume it's a "character flaw" meant to make him more endearing in a "dirty old man from an '80s anime" kind of way, but that doesn't prevent his behavior from being completely unwelcome and unnecessary.)

The character you'll spend the most time with is Date's partner Aiba, an artificial intelligence that resides in his prosthetic eye and pulls triple duty as his computer, cell phone and conscience (don't be a pervert, Date!). Calm and calculating when the situation demands, she also has a playful side that emerges during Psyncing — whenever a person of interest is unable or unwilling to spill the goods, Date hooks them up to a Psync Machine and dives into their mind. In this dreamscape (or Somnium), Aiba assumes a humanoid form and explores according to Date's commands — but not without first taking the opportunity to stretch her materialized legs and act like a goofball!

Somnia are essentially puzzle rooms, though the symbolic nature of dreams means that solutions don't always follow real-world logic (praying to a flower makes it bloom, I guess?). Because all actions incur a penalty against a six-minute time limit, trial and error doesn't seem like it would be encouraged — yet that's precisely what's required on initial attempts. It's a clever spin on traditional puzzle design, but the heavy abstraction sparks annoyance as often as it does enjoyment.

How you clear certain Somnia will unlock alternate story branches, and only by exploring every branch will you solve the larger mystery. Most striking when exploring new branches are the tonal shifts — warm and tender down one path, shocking and gruesome along the next. One late-game sequence disturbed me so greatly that I had to momentarily turn away from the screen . . . yet I find it beyond fascinating how a single experience can draw out such diametrically opposed reactions.

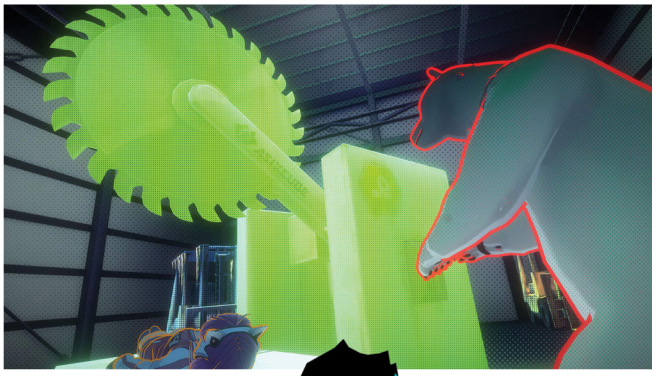
After a comparatively slow couple of hours at the start, AI: The Somnium Files takes off and never slows down. Each revelation opens a fresh set of questions, so you can never be quite sure where the story will go next. And it wouldn't be an Uchikoshi adventure without delving into the scientific and philosophical, with a major focus here on neurological disorders and parental love. Morbid, charming and everything in between, it's an experience unlike any other.

If only Date weren't such a creep!

— TONY

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SPIKE CHUNSOFT RATING: M



ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the past two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Astral Chain	8.5	Jonathan	#42
Batman: The Telltale Series	8.0	Lucas	#32
Bayonetta	9.0	Daan	#32
Bayonetta 2	9.0	Daan	#32
Blade Strangers	7.0	Jonathan	#36
Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker	7.5	Neal	#35
Contra: Rogue Corps	7.0	David	#43
Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy	7.5	David	#35
Crash Team Racing: Nitro-Fueled	8.0	David	#41
Crystal Crisis	9.0	Jonathan	#40
Daemon X Machina	7.0	Chris	#42
Dark Souls: Remastered	8.0	Chris	#37
Diablo III: Eternal Collection	9.0	Nadia	#37
Dragon Ball FighterZ	8.0	Tony	#36
Dragon Quest Builders	9.0	Lucas	#32
Dragon Quest Builders 2	9.0	Shesez	#41
Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition	9.5	Lucas	#43
Dreamworks Dragons: Dawn of New Riders	7.5	David	#39
Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze	9.5	David	#34
DOOM	8.0	Tony	#33
Fire Emblem: Three Houses	9.5	Lucas	#41
Fitness Boxing	5.5	Chris	#38
Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered	7.5	Brett	#43
Guacamelee! One-Two Punch Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#42
Hyrule Warriors: Definitive Edition	7.5	Neal	#34
Ittle Dew 2+	8.0	Lucas	#32
Katamari Damacy REROLL	9.5	Tony	#38
Kirby Star Allies	7.0	Brett	#33
L.A. Noire	8.0	Kevin C.	#31
LEGO DC Super-Villains	8.0	Thor	#38
LEGO Marvel Super Heroes 2	7.5	David	#32
Little Dragons Café	7.0	Rebecca	#36
Mario Tennis Aces	6.5	Lucas	#35
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3: The Black Order	7.0	Brett	#41
Mega Man 11	11/13	David	#36
Mega Man Legacy Collection	9.0	Neal	#34
Mega Man Legacy Collection 2	7.0	Neal	#34
Mega Man X Legacy Collection	9.5	Jonathan	#35
Mega Man X Legacy Collection 2	7.0	Jonathan	#35
Monster Boy and the Cursed Kingdom	8.5	David	#38
Monster Hunter Generations Ultimate	7.5	Kevin K.	#37
Moonlighter	8.0	Lucas	#39
My Time at Portia	5.5	Chris	#40
Namco Museum Arcade Pac	7.0	Brett	#38
New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe	8.0	Lucas	#38
Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	9.0	Brett	#43
Nickelodeon Kart Racers	5.0	David	#37
Nintendo Labo Robot Kit	7.5	Lucas	#34
Nintendo Labo Variety Kit	8.5	Lucas	#34
Nintendo Labo Vehicle Kit	8.5	Lucas	#36
Nintendo Labo VR Kit	9.0	Lucas	#40
Octopath Traveler	8.5	Brett	#35
Overcooked! 2	7.0	Brett	#35
Owlboy	9.5	Chris	#33
Paw Patrol: On a Roll	8.5	Lucas	#37
Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! & Let's Go, Eevee!	8.5	Lucas	#37
Resident Evil Revelations	8.0	Jonathan	#31
Resident Evil Revelations 2	8.5	Jonathan	#31
RiME	7.0	Lucas	#33
Runner3	8.0	Kevin C.	#34
Scribblenauts Mega Pack	7.5	David	#37
Scribblenauts Showdown	7.5	David	#33
Sega Genesis Classics	8.5	Brett	#38
Shantae: Half-Genie Hero – Ultimate Edition	8.0	Tony	#34
Shining Resonance Refrain	7.0	Neal	#36
SNK 40th Anniversary Collection	8.5	Thor	#38
Sonic Forces	7.5	David	#31
Sonic Mania Plus	9.0	Tony	#35
Spyro Reignited Trilogy	9.0	David	#42
Star Wars Pinball	9.0	Lucas	#42
Starlink: Battle for Atlas	8.5	David	#37
Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection	8.5	Jonathan	#34
Super Dragon Ball Heroes: World Mission	6.0	Tony	#40
Super Mario Maker 2	10	Tony	#41
Super Mario Odyssey	9.5	Lucas	#31
Super Mario Party	9.0	Lucas	#36
Super Smash Bros. Ultimate	10	Lucas	#37
Sushi Striker: The Way of Sushido	7.5	Rebecca	#34
Team Sonic Racing	8.5	David	#41
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	9.0	Neal	#31
The End is Nigh	8.5	Jonathan	#31
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening	9.5	Jonathan	#43
The LEGO Ninjago Movie Video Game	8.0	David	#31
The Nintendo Switch Lite	9.0	Matthew L.	#43
The Sega Genesis Mini	9.0	David	#43
The World Ends With You: Final Remix	6.5	Rebecca	#37
Tiny Barbarian DX	8.5	Robert	#31
Travis Strikes Again: No More Heroes	8.0	Jonathan	#38
Valkyria Chronicles 4	8.5	Neal	#36
Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus	8.5	Neal	#35
Wolfenstein: Youngblood	7.0	Chris	#41
WWE 2K18	3.0	Lucas	#32
Xenoblade Chronicles 2	8.0	Kevin K.	#32
Xenoblade Chronicles 2: Torna ~ The Golden Country	8.5	Kevin K.	#36
Yonder: The Cloud Catcher Chronicles	7.0	Neal	#35
Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair	9.0	Tony	#43
Yoshi's Crafted World	7.5	Lucas	#39
Ys VIII: Lacrimosa of DANA	9.5	Lucas	#36

3DS

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Detective Pikachu	7.0	Rebecca	#33
Etrian Odyssey Nexus	8.5	Nadia	#39
Etrian Odyssey V: Beyond the Myth	6.5	Neal	#31
Kirby Battle Royale	6.0	Mark	#31
Kirby's Extra Epic Yarn	7.5	Neal	#39
Layton's Mystery Journey: Katrielle and the Millionaires' Conspiracy	7.5	Chris	#31
Luigi's Mansion	8.0	Neal	#36
Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story + Bowser Jr.'s Journey	9.0	Neal	#38
Mario Party: The Top 100	6.0	Daan	#31
Minecraft: New Nintendo 3DS Edition	5.5	Chris	#31
Monster Hunter Stories	8.5	Lucas	#31
Persona Q2: New Cinema Labyrinth	8.0	Matthew L.	#40
Pokémon Ultra Moon	9.0	Thor	#31
Pokémon Ultra Sun	8.5	Rebecca	#31
Radiant Historia: Perfect Chronology	8.0	Thor	#33
The Alliance Alive	5.5	Neal	#33
WarioWare Gold	8.5	Thor	#35
Yo-kai Watch 3	8.5	Lucas	#39
Yo-kai Watch Blasters: Red Cat Corps & White Dog Squad	6.5	Lucas	#37

REVIEW REMINDER TOKYO MIRAGE SESSIONS #FE

BEFORE YOUR EYES is Issue #44 of the ongoing NF journey, and it just so happens that our original review of the Wii U edition of this issue's cover game was published exactly half our lifetime ago, in NF #22! It's poetic, don't you think?

The good Neal Ronaghan of NWR put TMS#FE through its paces for NF, and he came away utterly impressed, praising it as "a mammoth, elegant game that oozes lighthearted Japanese style with a heaping influence of Megami Tensei demons and Fire Emblem elements." He declared it the best RPG the Wii U had to offer – and it's hard to argue against that assessment even now, years later!

In particular, Neal thought the game's dungeons (a.k.a. Idolaspheres) were "the absolute best part of the entire experience." "Each dungeon you go into has a unique theme, killer music and an engrossing labyrinthine design. . . . Each one has a unique hook, whether it's cameras that you have to avoid or light-up dance floors. Combat is fantastic. The light puzzles in each dungeon are fantastic. This aspect is just simply fantastic!"

Following the release of Tokyo Mirage Sessions, Atlus blessed the world with the sensational Persona 5 – in retrospect, it's easy to see how the strength of the dungeon designs in TMS became a positive influence on P5's dungeons, which were similarly praised.

Neal also loved the game's battle system, saying, "It's a blast making unique parties and seeing how characters work together." So that's great dungeons, great music and great combat. What more could you ask for? **– LUCAS**

TRAVELOGUE

TOKYO GAMER HOT SPOTS

Where the video game-loving community gathers!

TOKYO IS SUCH a sprawling environment that a person could spend an entire month getting up close and personal with its sights, sounds and flavors yet *still* feel like they've barely scratched the surface. Obviously there was no way a single article could provide enough of a comprehensive overview! I therefore invite you to join me on one more tour of the city, only this time we'll narrow the focus down to those hangouts that tickle the gamer enthusiast's fancy.

The Japanese take great pains to ensure that the past is never forgotten and that hard work is given the respect it deserves. This is reflected in their treatment of both the many historical monuments that dot their landscape and the media they consume. Think about your local used game store – how often are those cartridges rotting and coated in sticky residue, those discs scratched and unreadable? In Japan, not only are your shopping options much more varied than they are in the West, their goods are also always guaranteed to be in pristine condition. These are relics of an earlier age! They must be preserved for future generations!

Video games are an important aspect of Japan's pop culture, so it's only fair that games are celebrated in the same fashion as TV, movies and music. You'll see banners for the mobile sensation Granblue Fantasy flying in the streets and Animal Crossing denizens appearing on Tokyo Metro video announcements – heck, I once bought a bottle of contact lens drops shaped like a Dragon Quest Slime!

Then there are the stores entirely dedicated to gaming merchandise, from the dozen or so Pokémon Centers throughout the country to the Nintendo and Capcom stores that just opened in Shibuya. Whatever your persuasion, your needs are sure to be met!

Long story short, there are an incredible number of outlets to satisfy your gamer cravings – far too many to list in the pages ahead. In the end, I can only speak from personal experience – so without further ado, here are my personal favorite Tokyo gamer hot spots! Check out these joints whenever you're in town, and be sure to tell 'em Tony sent ya! **– TONY**

THE MOST WELL-KNOWN RETRO GAME SHOP

SUPER POTATO

Of all the colorful retro game shops in Japan, none are more renowned than Super Potato, whose main branch can be found in Akihabara. It's been the talk of bloggers and YouTubers for years now, heralded for its wide selection of hardware, software, soundtracks and bizarre gamer kitsch. Part of the reason that the Super Potato legend has been able to spread so smoothly is that, unlike many similar retailers, management openly invites patrons to film and photograph to their hearts' content – additional exposure can only grow the business further, after all! Sadly, this fame has come at a literal and figurative cost, as not only are prices often higher than those of competing stores, the influx of foreign customers with deep pockets results in periods of low stock. Despite that, however, I still recommend popping in and taking a look. Maybe you'll walk out with a Sharp Twin Famicom like I did!

A SUBTERRANEAN SANCTUARY FOR THE OBSCURE

BEEP

As wonderful as Super Potato may be, those with more peculiar tastes may be left wanting. During my first Akihabara quest, I met up with Matt Papa of Inti Creates, and he led me to an underground haven known only as BEEP. Here I would discover the oft-underrepresented world of Japanese gaming computers: MSX, PC-88, X68000, FM Towns and other names almost never discussed in the Western world. To educate players who were weaned on a diet of Nintendo and Sony and may have trouble appreciating this corner of gaming history, the shop owners have set up several stations with a rotating lineup of titles for visitors to sample for free. But if the more obscure side of mainstream consoles is what lights your fire, BEEP has you covered as well – I never thought I'd live to see the Panasonic Q, the Japan-exclusive GameCube and DVD player hybrid, with my own eyes!

SONIC'S INDOOR AMUSEMENT PARK

JOYPOLIS

Sega has long been a major player in the Japanese arcade scene, with numerous game centers scattered across the nation. The next logical step was clearly to make an indoor theme park! Situated inside Odaiba's DECKS Tokyo Beach shopping mall is Joypolis, a dimly lit hive of adrenaline-pumping amusements such as a House of the Dead 4 motion ride and an eight-player Sonic the Hedgehog track and field competition. Not all the attractions are based on Sega properties, however — there's a really intriguing Ace Attorney mystery-solving experience (but without a decent amount of Japanese literacy your enjoyment will be limited). The coolest ride is the Gekion Live Coaster, on which you'll zip around the room at breakneck speeds before pausing momentarily to play a rhythm game. And if you arrive after 5:00, not only will you not have to worry about long lines, you'll also shave a few yen off the entry fee!

OLD-SCHOOL GAMES & OCTOPI?

DAIBA ITCHŌME SHŌTENGAI

Ride the escalator just opposite of Joypolis and you'll pass through another one of those Tokyo time rifts. This one leads to Daiba Itchōme Shōtengai, a simulated shopping street with a distinctive old-school flair. There's an arcade so retro that some games only require a single 10-yen coin (the equivalent of a dime), though a few machines are a bit more contemporary — I nearly injured my wrist trying to beast out on their Arm Champs II cabinet! Further along is a pop gun shooting gallery every bit as rigged as you'd expect a '50s carnival attraction to be. Deeper and deeper still, past classic candy shops and stores proudly displaying American pop culture memorabilia, you reach a food court populated entirely by takoyaki stands. What's takoyaki? Why, chunks of octopus dipped in batter, molded into balls then served with toppings like fish flakes and mayonnaise, of course! It's really delicious, I swear!

MONSTERS ON THE MENU

SQUARE ENIX CAFÉ

As mentioned before, while many themed cafés only stick around for a brief period, others have found success as permanent installations, three of which exist just outside Akihabara Station. Take one exit and you can enjoy eateries themed around the long-running mecha anime franchise Gundam or the mega-popular, all-girl pop group AKB48. But head in the opposite direction and you'll enter the culinary dominion of Square Enix Café. Even before you take your seat, you'll find posters, figurines, plush dolls, key chains, CDs and other assorted merchandise from Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest and Kingdom Hearts. For my meal, I decided upon the Self-Destruct Bomb Croquette, a ball of spicy minced meat served entirely on fire! (And though I admit that the food at these types of establishments is nothing too tasty, how many folks honestly order tea filled with a Malboro Seed for any reason other than social media praise?)

THE MOST EXCESSIVE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

NAKANO BROADWAY

If you could condense Akihabara into a single multi-level shopping center, the result would be Nakano Broadway. It's as much a paradise for anime and video game fans, only here you don't have to worry about any of that pesky sunlight! One notable retailer you can't miss — no matter how hard you try — is Mandarake, a second-hand goods chain with an excessive 25 locations in just this complex alone. (One store may specialize in cosplay and accessories, another in collectible cards and another still in Ghibli merchandise.) And yes, there's a space or two dedicated to used video games and paraphernalia, including some extremely high-end items like the Super Metroid soundtrack for a heart-stopping 18,000 yen ($165)! Once you finish stuffing your bags, head to the basement food market and seek out Daily Chico, where you can score an eight-scoop ice cream cone tower for under the equivalent of five bucks!

HOT SPOTS GONE COLD

In a country so fixated on historical preservation, the cold truth remains that few things last forever. Some of my favorite Tokyo gamer hangouts have closed their doors for good in recent months, but though their existence was fleeting, I'm grateful for all the happy memories I made in the time allowed. (No, what saddens me most is the thought that most of you will never get to enjoy these places firsthand!)

SAY SAYONARA TO THE SHORYUKENS

CAPCOM BAR

Back in 2017, my good friend Alex and his brothers were vacationing in Tokyo the same week I was in town for Tokyo Game Show. We thought, how should we commemorate this glorious reunion? Since we all love Capcom games, why not have lunch at Capcom Bar in Shinjuku? Thus we found ourselves sitting at a booth, poring over a menu of tantalizing Capcom-themed delicacies: Cammy's Delta Drive soda cocktail, Dante's Devil Trigger pasta, Resident Evil brain cake, Godot's special coffee blend! After cleaning our plates, I turned my attention to a PlayStation VR station with Resident Evil 7 running, which ended in my tumbling off the stool after a nasty jump scare. Yes, fun times were had! By the following February, Capcom Bar had shut down, undergone renovations and later reopened as a solely Monster Hunter-focused eatery. Nothing against Monster Hunter, but c'mon! Where am I going to get Cut Man gratin now!?

NO ESCAPE FROM FINANCIAL REALITY

VR ZONE SHINJUKU

I caught wind of the Mario Kart VR experience in the newly opened VR Zone Shinjuku a few years ago, but it wasn't until my most recent Tokyo holiday this past February when I could satisfy my curiosity. Burning rubber in the Mushroom Kingdom wasn't all that greeted me in the Bandai Namco establishment. I strapped on some hand and foot sensors and tossed ki blasts alongside Goku in Dragon Ball VR! I took up arms against an invading swarm in Galaga Fever! And best of all, I teamed up with two other players and battled the evil Zoma in the full-body, free-roaming Dragon Quest VR! So lost was I in my virtual fantasies that my mind never registered how empty the place was. A few short weeks later, the plug on the whole operation had been pulled. Thankfully, not all is lost — another VR Zone is still in operation an hour-long flight away in Osaka. Be sure to head there when you want to escape actual reality for a while!

WE MAY NEVER SEE ITS EQUAL AGAIN

ANATA NO WAREHOUSE

The fates of Capcom Bar and VR Zone Shinjuku may have disappointed me for sure, but it's this last closure that breaks my heart as much as the loss of a pet would. A half-hour train ride from central Tokyo is the city of Kawasaki. Here you'll find the former site of Anata no Warehouse ("Your Warehouse"), which, in my humblest of opinions, is the greatest arcade that has ever existed. What made it so special, you ask? Was it the rows and rows of half-price retro cabinets? An original Street Fighter machine with punch pads instead of buttons? An entire floor dedicated to table tennis, billiards and darts? A flippin' massage parlor!? Well, yeah, but what truly elevated Anata no Warehouse above your run-of-the-mill electric playground was pure presentation!

The building's exterior is lined with rusty sheet metal and bereft of a single window, appearing to all the world like the lone surviving structure of a nuclear apocalypse. Rather than a traditional sliding door, the front entrance is an imposing portal, beyond which lies a dingy hallway dripping in moisture and decay. The garage entrance paints an entirely different scene — a pool of glowing green ooze with awkwardly placed stepping stones and gnarled metal handrails that offer little if any support. The one anachronism in this environment is the gleaming escalator that ought to lead to the second floor game room, but what greets you instead is a painstaking reconstruction of Kowloon Walled City, the densely packed Hong Kong settlement rife with drugs, gambling and organized crime. (I don't know whose decision it was to theme an arcade around such a disreputable stain on the former British territory, but somebody deserves their own Scrooge McDuck money bin filled with 100-yen coins!)

Whenever I've offered sightseeing recommendations to friends visiting Japan for the first time, Anata no Warehouse has always topped my list. It took a crazy concept and applied it in a way that's so uniquely Japanese that even travelers who don't share a passion for video games could appreciate its dystopian beauty. Well, not anymore. On November 17, 2019, the most unusual arcade on the planet ended its 10-year run of delivering digital delight to the Greater Tokyo Area. There's no silver lining here . . . only the bittersweet reminder of what once was.

INDEPENDENT HARDWARE CREATION

Is This the Ultimate Game Boy?

The all-new Analogue Pocket modernizes Nintendo's 30-year-old portable system.

AS NOSTALGIA FOR the Game Boy era intensifies, a thriving cottage industry has sprung up around giving fans a more modern way to enjoy the classic handheld. Many hobbyists have modded authentic Game Boys, adding in backlit screens and rechargeable battery packs; while several companies have offered up tiny emulation devices that play shady pirated copies of Wario Land II or Shantae.

Enter the Analogue Pocket, by far the sleekest and most stylish of all reimagined Game Boy-style handhelds. Looking as if the beloved Game Boy Pocket had been given a makeover by Apple, the device boasts a large 3.5 inch, 1440p screen, which is far bigger than the display of the original Game Boy, and a far higher resolution than even the Switch.

If the incredible display weren't enough (because, let's face it, a high resolution doesn't really make a difference when playing pixelated Game Boy games), the Analogue Pocket is also proudly emulation-free. This isn't a cheap Raspberry Pi, dutifully running sketchy ROMs; instead, the Pocket reads game cartridges in the same way as the original Game Boy handhelds, delivering (in theory at least) a flawless, authentic gaming experience.

Perhaps the biggest selling point of all, though, is the fact that the Pocket doesn't just play Game Boy games. This small handheld can also run Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance titles, which is to be expected — but with the use of adapters, it can also play Game Gear, Neo Geo Pocket Color and Atari Lynx cartridges. Plus, the built-in lithium ion battery means that, unlike playing the original devices, you won't be constantly burning through AA batteries. For any fan of retro handheld gaming, this is quite a tempting prospect.

There's just one inescapable problem: the price. This high-end gadget is aimed squarely at the discerning but somewhat wealthy retro collector who is willing to shell out $199.99 for the privilege of playing all their handheld cartridge games on the same device. This price doesn't even cover the cost of the cartridge adapters for non-Nintendo games!

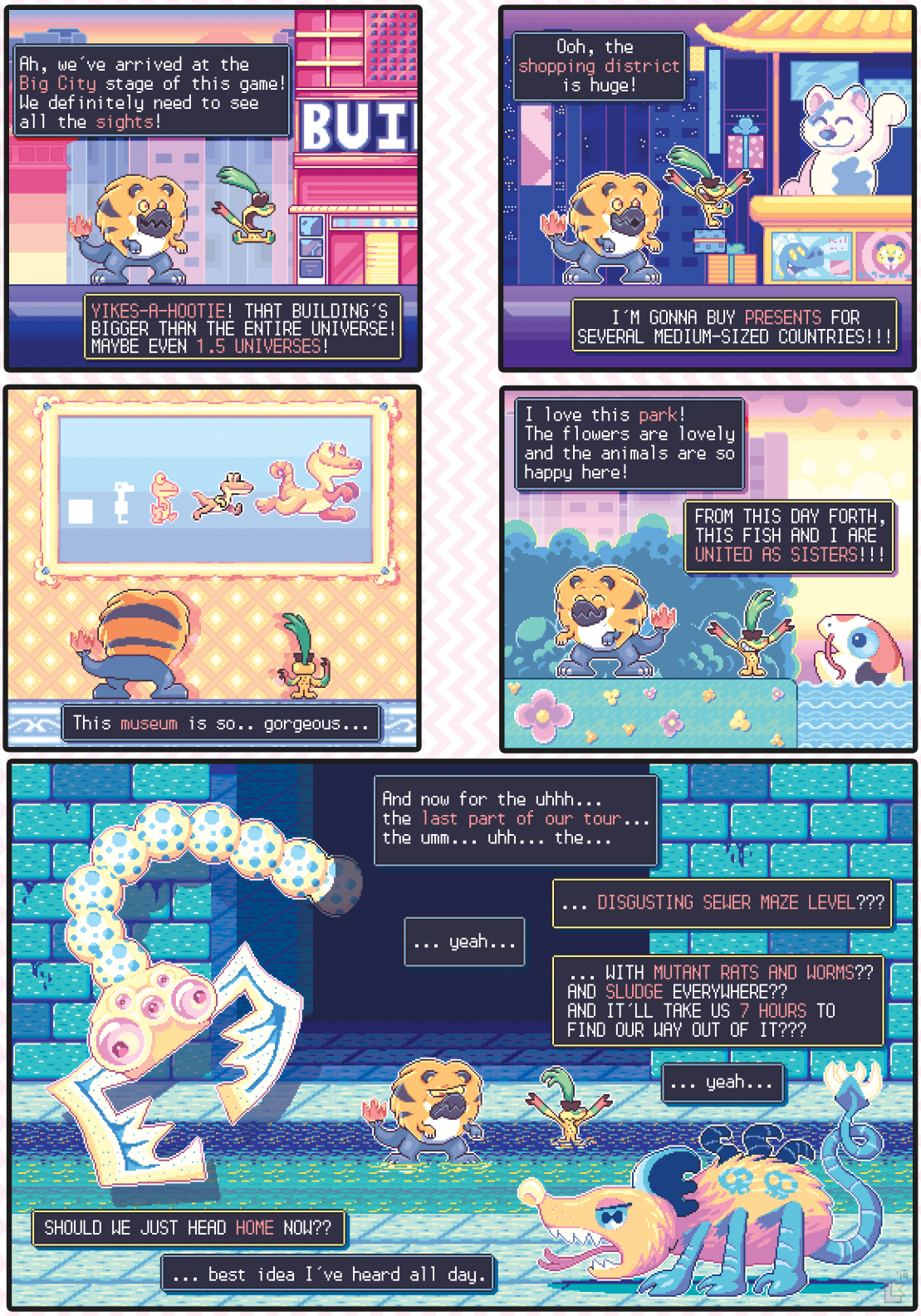
If the price doesn't put you off, keep your eye on the URL below — the Analogue Pocket is set to go on sale there some time in 2020. **— MATTHEW L.**

analogue.co/pocket

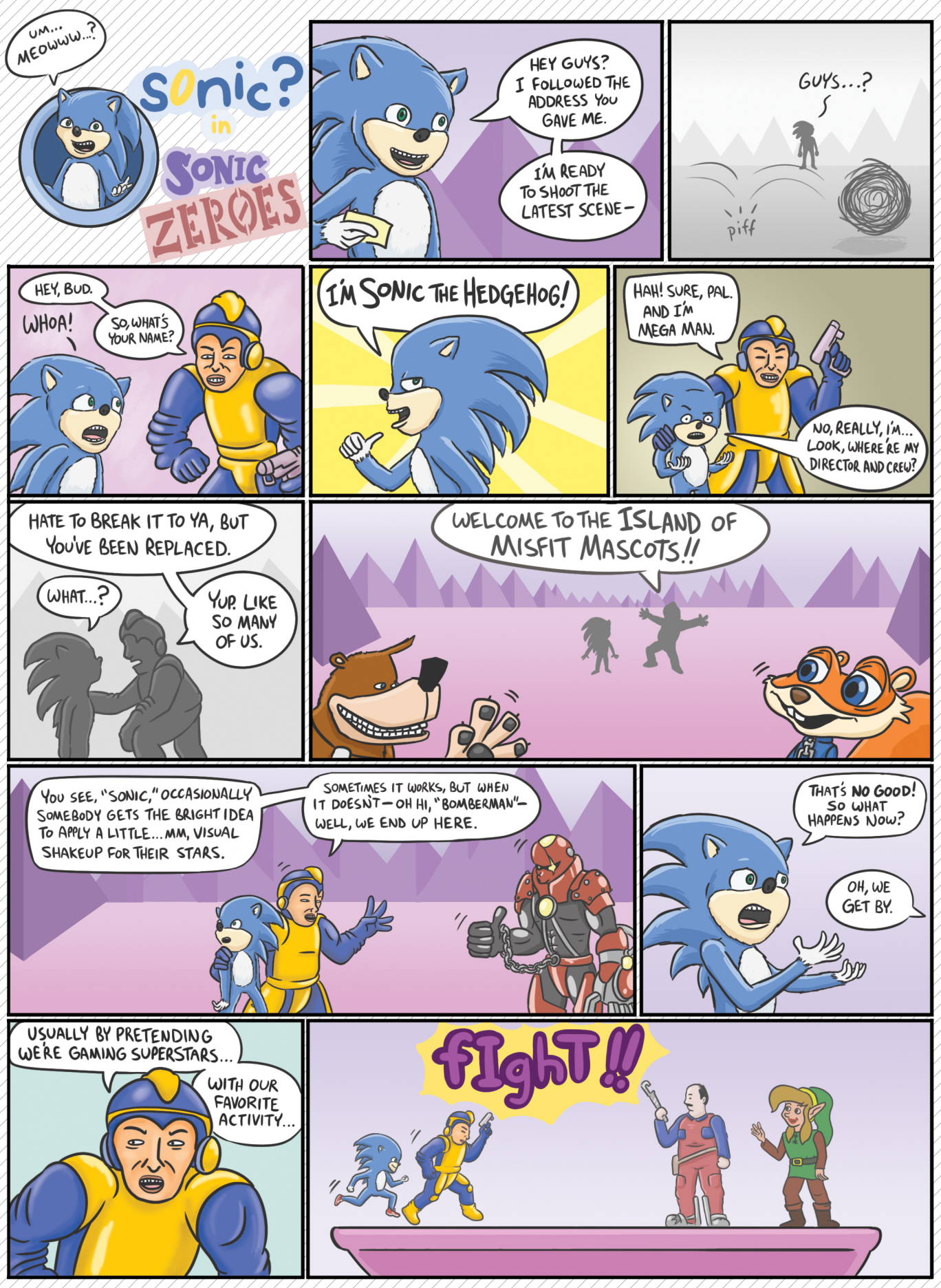
REST O

the sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s video game mascot

by LLK



BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING



BY MATTHEW TARANTO

NEXT ISSUE

Nearly seven years have passed since the release of the last mainline Animal Crossing series sequel, and we're long overdue for a real return to the world of living next door to ducks, dogs and deer! Luckily, the long-awaited Switch sequel is now just over the horizon: **Animal Crossing: New Horizons**! We'll celebrate its impeding arrival with a new NF issue dedicated to all things AC, revisiting the history of the famous franchise and preparing you all to leap into an all-new island living lifestyle in the new game. (I don't suppose there's any way we can go ahead and bank some Bells in advance, right? Not looking forward to being indebted to the Nook family again . . .)

We *may* also be cooking up a special surprise to include in this particular issue . . . so you won't want to miss it! Please look forward to it!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #45:

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS

VITAMIN CONNECTION

TRIALS OF MANA

SNACK WORLD: THE DUNGEON CRAWL – GOLD

DOOM ETERNAL

SHANTAE AND THE SEVEN SIRENS

TOKYO MIRAGE SESSIONS #FE ENCORE

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: **BREATH OF THE WILD 2**

SHOVEL KNIGHT: KING OF CARDS

SHOVEL KNIGHT SHOWDOWN

THE DARK CRYSTAL: AGE OF RESISTANCE – TACTICS

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES: DEFINITIVE EDITION

NO MORE HEROES III

AND MUCH **MORE!**

MARCH/ APRIL 2020

THE END OF A DECADE!

AS THE CALENDAR flips into 2020, another full decade of Nintendo gaming has come to an end. And Nintendo had quite a decade from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2019!

The era began in the back half of the Wii's life cycle, encompassed the entirety of the Wii U age and gave us nearly three years' worth of the Switch. On the handheld side of things, the decade was almost entirely dominated by the 3DS — its eight-year run began in 2011 and just wrapped up, arguably, a few months ago.

As a thought exercise, I figured I'd look back across this 10-year span and pick out my favorite Nintendo games of the decade. Limiting myself to just four, my personal picks are 2012's Kid Icarus: Uprising for its glorious revival of my favorite childhood character; Xenoblade Chronicles, also from 2012 (but only because NOA had to be dragged kicking and screaming into publishing it in America); Splatoon, for being the most inventive new IP full of pure joy and the crown jewel of the Wii U library; and, perhaps unsurprisingly, Breath of the Wild, which would surely make a lot of other Nintendo fans' shortlists too. How about yours? I invite you to pick your own four! **— LUCAS**

PATREON.COM
/NINTENDOFORCE

/NINTENDOFORCE

WWW.
NFMAGAZINE.COM

YouTube
/NFMAGAZINE

@NINTENDOFORCE